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AML

Annual

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Annual

of the

Association for Mormon Letters

2000

Papers from the Annual Meeting
20 February 1999
Westminster College
Salt Lake City, Utah

Edited by
Lavina Fielding Anderson

Association for Mormon Letters
Salt Lake City, Utah
2000

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Also presented at the Association for Mormon Letters Annual Conference on 20 February 1999 but not submitted for publication were: John Needham, "'Unable to Hide in the Certainty Anymore': Phyllis Barber's *How I Got Cultured* as Literary Family Album"; Melinda Mathes Wolfer, "Po-Mo-Mo-monism): The Quintessence of Samuelsenism" ; and Eric Samuelsen, "'Typically Mormon': Neil Labute, Johnny Whitaker, Donny and Marie and the Mormonizing of Popular Culture"; Lance Larson also read selected poems in the same session as Robert A. Christmas, Robert M. Hogge, and Scott Samuelson.

Ann Edwards Cannon and Ken Cannon II hosted a buffet and readings by the 1999 AML award winners in the evening.

Presenters at the AML conjoint session of the Rocky Mountain Language Association annual meeting, organized by Helynne Hansen, held 8-10 October 1999, at Salt Lake City, were: Boyd Peterson, "Landscapes of Seduction: Terry Tempest William's *Desert Quartet* and the Biblical Song of Songs" and Harlow Söderborg Clark, "Clory's Great S(i)mile: Vocabulary and Ending in Maurine Whipple's *The Giant Joshua*."

The Marilyn Brown Novel Award

1. The Marilyn Brown Novel Award of $1,000 is awarded in even-numbered years, beginning in 2000, for a novel best reflecting Mormon values and culture, and answering to as many of these three criteria as possible: (1) written by a Mormon, (2) written about Mormons, and (3) written for Mormons to read. "Mormon" is not necessarily prerequisite, but the promotion of high and moral values is.

2. Only unpublished novels are eligible. The author may be seeking a publisher but, to remain eligible for the award, may not sign a contract with a publisher until after the AML Meeting (February of even-numbered years) in which the award is presented.

3. The $1,000 prize may be used by the author for his or her own purposes or toward publication of the book by Mrs. Brown's Salt Press or any other press agreeable with this arrangement.

4. The judges will be Marilyn Brown (consistently) plus two volunteer rotating judges from the membership of AML, chosen by the AML Board of Directors. If a majority of judges does not agree on a winner or does not feel that any manuscript is worthy of the prize, it will not be awarded that year.

5. Manuscripts must be typed, double-spaced, on one side of 8½ by 11 inch white paper and mailed in a box. The name of the novel and the author's name, address, and phone number should be placed in a letter sealed in an envelope with only the name of the novel on the outside of the envelope. A self-addressed stamped postcard may be included if the author wishes to receive notification that the manuscript has been received. If the author wishes the manuscript to be returned after judging, he or she must include sufficient postage for the return.

6. Entries must be postmarked by July 1 of odd-numbered years. Manuscripts must be addressed to the Marilyn Brown Novel Contest, 125 Hobble Creek Canyon, Springville, UT 84663. Neither the AML nor Marilyn Brown is responsible for damaged, late, misaddressed, or otherwise problematic manuscripts.

7. For clarification of these rules, contact Marilyn Brown (801) 489-4980.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Heart, Mind, and Soul: The Power of Mormon Letters

Neal W. Kramer

When I was in my early teens, it seems like I was no older than fourteen, I received a special gift from my grandparents. They knew I liked to read. In fact, they knew that I read a lot. I was a regular patron of the local library, often rushing through two or three books on a long summer day. Of their twenty-seven grandchildren, therefore, I was singled out to receive a treasured possession, a copy of Orson F. Whitney's romantic poem published in 1918, *Love and the Light*, which my grandfather had given my grandmother shortly before they were married in 1926.

The book was remarkable to me. It was the very first example of Mormon literature I had ever seen. In fact, I was amazed that Mormons actually wrote literature for other Mormons. I had thought that, if we needed literature, we turned to the Gentiles–or the Reader's Digest Condensed Books in the basement. I was not surprised to find, however, that Elder Whitney had written the poetic romance for the youth of the Church. It was didactic literature designed to help young people struggling with intellectual challenges to their faith. In addition, it provided models for appropriate behavior. Whitney hoped to educate our conduct and believed literature was an appropriate vehicle to that end. I am still pleased to have received that gift. It holds a prominent place today on my most important bookshelf. I also continue to ponder the idea that Mormon literature ought to use the power of its art to educate conduct.

The commonplace I have been describing, the power of literature to influence our conduct in deeply meaningful ways, has been under assault for over two hundred years. With the advent of modernism in poetry, painting, and fiction came a new commonplace. Art was valuable for its own sake—as something beautifully crafted—and not because it persuaded or moved us to become better ourselves.

Both Gerald Graff and John Guillory, literary critics at the University of Chicago and Johns Hopkins University respectively, have recently noted that this new sensibility created the perception of a major rupture in the way people think about literary art. Today it is possible to see this rupture as a dichotomy between thought and feeling, with each half of the dichotomy fundamentally opposed to the other. Perception of such an opposition easily translates into a careless analogy. We start to believe that all dualities must take the form of the fundamental opposition between good and evil. Suddenly, in everything from politics to professional wrestling, we feel that all apparent oppositions have cosmic consequences: the good candidate (from our party) versus the evil candidate (from their party), and so on. So two complementary, not opposed, concepts like thought and feeling are envisioned as being at war with

HEART	MIND	SOUL
EXCESS Passion: rashness, lasciviousness, and wrath	EXCESS Dogmatism: dishonest certainty	EXCESS Asceticism: life is corrupting
MORAL VIRTUES Affection: love, charity, courage, loyalty, mercy, etc.	MORAL VIRTUES Reason: reasonableness, truth, justice, craftsmanship, beauty, etc.	MORAL VIRTUES Inspiration: joy, awe, worship, hope, peace, etc.
DEFICIENCY Sentimentality: unearned affections	DEFICIENCY Lightmindedness: triviality, silliness, "nothing is sacred"	DEFICIENCY Materialism: "trusting in the arm of flesh"

one another, to the ultimate detriment of both. Such an artificial opposition can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: the thoughtful afraid to feel while the sensitive become afraid to think.

As you've already gathered, I don't find the opposition between thought and feeling very useful in the study or teaching of literature. It has always seemed to me that the value of literature came in its ability to combine the two to try to teach truth. Therefore, I'd like to suggest to you today a different framework, which I hope you will find useful as you think about what you want to read and see and as you evaluate what your preferences ought to be as Latter-day Saints and readers of literature. I sincerely hope that what I recommend today communicates to you in both those roles.

The first step away from seeing feeling and thought as binary opposites is to somehow change the relationship. As I considered how to separate this couple, it occurred to me that scripture does not seem to respect this modern opposition. I noted, for example, that scripture sometimes refers to something like feeling as "heart" and to something like thought as "mind." But in the most crucial place where these two terms appear (Matt. 22:37), the Savior inserts another term: "soul." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." I liked it immediately. I noted that this tripartite relationship removes the connotation of necessary opposition. That seemed much better than simple opposition. It felt right.

In addition, however, the triplet implies something beyond these concepts being simply separate but equal. To love God with heart, soul, and mind implies a high level of unity or integrity among the three. To love God with heart and soul, heart and mind, or any other partial combination of the three would be inadequate. The three must be separate entities, but they must also all be necessary to each other to complete a unit greater than any single one or even any pair. I would like to suggest that a good framework for evaluating powerful literature and its consequences for readers starts with thinking about these three concepts as parts of us—heart, soul, and mind—that are engaged, affected, and influenced by powerful literature.

I will begin by defining each category. In relatively simple terms, we can think of each as an essential human capacity: the heart is our capacity for affection; the mind is our capacity for reason; the soul is our capacity for inspiration. Let me also suggest that each of these capacities is associated with a number of qualities that we can call moral virtues, in the sense that the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, uses that phrase in *Nichomachean Ethics.* We can associate virtues like love, charity, courage, loyalty, and mercy with the heart; reasonableness, truth, justice, craftsmanship, and beauty with the mind; joy, awe, worship, and hope with the soul. We can see that these capacities are not innate but that they need to be developed. The fact that they can be developed, however, also supposes that they can be disfigured and distorted. Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained how potential strengths or virtues can become weaknesses in these terms: "It may be just as dangerous to exceed orthodoxy as it is to fall short of it. The safety and happiness we are promised lie in keeping the commandments, not in discounting or multiplying them" (13). The fact that we can, and do, "exceed" and "multiply" or "fall short" and "discount" our capacities explains much about how heart, soul, and mind function. Aristotle similarly used the terms "excess" and "deficiency" to explain how virtues can become vices (Bk. II).

Allow me to explore how the virtues of the heart, soul, and mind can become distorted through excess or deficiency as a means of suggesting a method for evaluating the power of literature. The virtues of heart are associated with affection that is honest, genuine, and sincere. Excess of heart is something different. Technically it is no longer even heart but something else. Excess of heart, I suggest, must be associated with unbridled passion. Passion distorts the heart and moves us quickly beyond the bounds the Lord has set to rashness, lasciviousness, and wrath. Its consequences are damaging not only to ourselves but also to others. Excess of "heart" becomes threatening and dangerous.

Deficiency of heart, on the other hand, resembles something like sentimentality. Sentimentality is lazy. It produces emotions that are unearned, and it has no lasting effect. It is like the excitement that comes while you listen to a popular song but dissipates as soon as the last note dies. It has no lasting effect beyond tricking you into believing you have experienced the real thing. If you experience only sentimentality, your life will be devoid of genuine affection, of lasting relationships.

The virtues of mind are associated with the honest and humble search for truth. The standard of "mind" is reason, but reason that is familiar and comfortable with the ways of the heart and the soul. I suggest that excess of mind results in dogmatism. Dogmatism is dishonest certainty, knowing without effort that your truth is deeper and more profound than anyone else's and being willing to enforce it. It results in book banning, petty inquisitions, and fear of any claims to continuing revelation. Deficiency of mind, I think, can best be characterized as what the Lord calls "light-mindedness" (D&C 88: 121). It consists mainly in trivializing things of great importance. It is also just plain silliness, the sort of thing that passes for entertainment on late-night television or daytime talk shows. It is the endless sharing of opinions on the radio without any effort to justify them. It is the attitude that nothing is sacred. I'm afraid it characterizes much of life in America today.

The virtues of soul are associated with inspiration from on high. They lead us to recognize, with Gerard Manley Hopkins, that the "world is charged with the grandeur of God." They hasten the sudden feeling, on a crisp winter morning with the sun shining brightly and the temperature hovering somewhere between freezing and zero, that Jesus is indeed the light and life of the world. They invite us to find meaning in our lives, to sense what the apostle Paul taught, that we are actually children of the living God. "That in him we live, and move, and have our being . . . for we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). Inspiration leads us upward, inviting us to understand not just who we are but who we may become.

The excess of soul is asceticism, a belief that life is corrupting. It claims to lead us to God by having us despise our bodies, our social relations, and our daily work. It claims that God demands our total and exclusive devotion and attention. It sees our service to God as adoration of him without service to our fellow beings. Deficiency of soul is materialism, trusting in the arm of flesh. For the materialist, the world we see is all there is. The materialist focuses exclusively on the present. Materialism suggests that "every man fare[s] in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prosper[s] according to his genius, and . . . every man conquer[s] according to his strength" (Alma 30:17).

Before we go on to discuss how these definitions help us to think more carefully about the consequences for conduct of reading literature, I need to say a little more about the relationship between heart, soul, and mind. It may seem that each one should serve as a corrective for the other if they fall out of balance. But that is not the case. A little dose of mind will not mend a distortion of the heart or soul. These capacities do not sit in uneasy balance with each other that can be easily upset or easily rectified. If that were so, a tepid moderation or mediocrity would be the ultimate virtue. We can compare the complete set of virtues associated with heart, mind, and soul, to a piano keyboard. When the piano is in tune and the notes are played in concert with one another, we experience integrity. The finest music comes from the integrated playing of the most keys. But a catchy tune using fewer keys can still be good. On the virtue keyboard, "excess" or "extreme" and "defect" or "deficiency" refer to states of quality (like a key that needs to be tuned) not quantity (hitting the wrong note). As we improve each separate capacity, we become better people. The best people will have developed all three capacities to a large degree and will have discovered how and where they overlap, thereby moving toward a richer integrity.

How, then, ought we to think about heart, soul, and mind in relation to literature—poetry, drama, and fiction? I suggest that we think more carefully about how individual works of literature seek to influence each of these fundamental human capacities by asking a few questions. Does the work appeal to one capacity more than another? Which one? Does the appeal suggest a particular virtue or a collection of virtues associated with the capacity? Or does the work promote a deficient or extreme distortion of the capacity? What evidence from the text itself supports this interpretation?

It is my contention that works of literature often reveal important ideas in crucial scenes that help to illuminate appeals to the capacities we've been talking about. Careful scrutiny of such scenes or passages can help us understand the kinds of appeals that poems, plays, novels, television programs, and movies are making to heart, soul, and mind. The same kind of scrutiny can help us learn to adjust our taste—our desire to be entertained and instructed by certain kinds of literature. Our educated and spiritual tastes should lead us to literature that is aware of its persuasive power to influence conduct and that seeks to lead us upward, to expand our hearts, souls, and minds in the direction of righteousness, truth, and virtue. I fully realize that this makes our experience of literature more intellectual and more challenging. Anything less, I suspect, would diminish our awareness of ourselves as children of God. It would encourage us to allow ourselves to be entertained and unconsciously influenced by the heartless, the soulless, and the mindless.

For the next few minutes, then, I would like to present and examine some of these crucial scenes, scrutinizing their appeals and evaluating their influence. I suggest that we begin with a book by one of today's most popular writers, Tom Clancy.

Clancy's *Without Remorse* was a *New York Times* number one best-seller in 1993 and 1994. It is the story of a Rambo-like character, John Kelly. Kelly is a former Navy S.E.A.L. working for the CIA, who, under the assumed name of John Clark, becomes an amoral killing machine. Clark seems to possess infinite knowledge of how to kill and infinite capacity to apply it. As we consider the framework I laid out above, it is very apparent that Clancy has chosen to appeal to heart. The novel wants to appeal to patriotism, our love of country. But it also wants to teach us something, by this patriotic appeal, about the conflict between good and evil in the world of international politics. Its most important theme is that evil has no conscience; therefore, the good must use men like Clark to defeat evil at its own game if the good is to survive. Clancy illuminates this theme by sending Clark into Vietnam to rescue a good, but weak, prisoner of war named Robin Zacharias.

Clancy illustrates Zacharias's weaknesses in many ways. But one of the most telling occurs during an interrogation scene, when Zacharias's Russian handler gets him drunk and asks about the capability of new American aircraft. Zacharias has been severely beaten by Vietnamese guards and never broken. But the Russian understands that the way to break him is to play on his religious beliefs and practices. Zacharias is a Mormon. Following an especially severe beating, the Russian offers him something to drink. Zacharias responds:

> "I can't," the American gasped, ". . . can't drink, can't . . ."
>
> "Robin, it is medicine. This is not entertainment. Your religion has no rule against this. Please, my friend, you need this. It's the best I can do for you." Grishanov added in a voice that shuddered with frustration. "You must, Robin."
>
> *Maybe it is medicine*, Zacharias thought. Some medicines used an alcohol base as a preservative, and the Church permitted that, didn't it? He couldn't remember, and in not knowing he took another swallow. Nor did he know that as the adrenaline that the beating had flooded into his system dissipated, the natural relaxation of his body would only be accentuated by the drink. (276)

Thus far Zacharias has been capable of withstanding extraordinary pressure. But, at this crucial moment, because he has had no prior experience with alcohol, he becomes prey to the machinations of the evil Russian. What should have been his goodness and his strength turns instead into naivete and weakness. Clancy has the Russian note with some amazement and satisfaction "that the liquor had worked so quickly. The man had never had a drink in his life until twenty minutes earlier. How remarkable that a man would choose to live without drink" (278).

The only thing that prevents Zacharias from giving away all the information he has every time Grishanov comes by with more cheap vodka is the arrival of the brutal, conscienceless Clark. Once the prisoners have been rescued, Clark goes on to clean up a ring of kidnappers and drug smugglers back in the USA. The local police capture him but think better of it and allow him to slip away into the night. Thereafter, his identity is protected by the FBI and CIA as a necessary weapon in the fight against evil. We last see him happily at home with his unsuspecting wife. After a mysterious phone call, she asks who it was. "'A friend,' Clark said, wiping his eyes as he turned to kiss his wife. 'From another life'" (750). The point is that we need men with his abilities, even though their methods are immoral and unlawful, to protect the illusion of our morality and the rule of law.

My analysis of the novel is too short, and therefore somewhat superficial, but I think we should still ask a couple of questions stimulated by the critical framework. I have already suggested that the novel appeals to the heart. But the question now must be whether the conduct enjoined by the book is defined by heart or its excess or deficiency. The book is sometimes sentimental, but mostly it is passionate. It is filled with violence, and it glorifies calculated and carefully consummated acts of unspeakable brutality, as long as the victims are "evil." It even invites us to be entertained as we are repulsed by brutal attacks against innocent victims as the book showcases the overwhelming power of violence.

Does the book speak to mind? In this case, I would be inclined to say that the book is lightminded. It does not ultimately take either good or evil seriously. When goodness is weakness and requires conscienceless brutality to save it from its "weakest" instincts, one must conclude that the writer has simply not thought carefully enough about the power of goodness. We need only contrast Clark's work, as my wife did, with something as simple as Luke Skywalker's Force-aided destruction of the battle station in *Star Wars* to see that *Without Remorse* doesn't measure up.

Does the book speak to soul? Again, one has to say, no. Here, the problem is all too obvious. This book reminds us that international politics is all about the arm of flesh. He whose arm is most flesh is he whose way of life will survive. Its wisdom is the wisdom of Machiavelli. Our conclusion? Excess, defect, defect. Three strikes and you're out.

The bad example of Clancy's popular view of Mormons—people possessed of a sentimental goodness that emasculates and weakens us in the face of real evil—invites us now to take a closer look at literature authored by Mormons. I believe that good Mormon writers try to find ways to engage these fundamental capacities—heart, soul, and mind—in profound and often challenging ways. Today I'm going to take a closer look at three works which last year won AML awards: Brady Udall's "Beautiful Places," a story from his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds,* Susan Howe's poem "Mountain Psalm" from her collection *Stone Spirits,* and Eric Samuelsen's play *Gadianton.* Each work addresses its audience with the idea of inviting further thought about identity, LDS and otherwise—but also about conduct. Each piece suggests dilemmas that good people may face and then probes how responses to the dilemmas become crucial to the further growth and definition of character. Allow me to examine each dilemma through the framework I've proposed. The results may surprise you.

Brady Udall's story "Beautiful Places" exhibits many characteristics of the other stories in his collection, *Letting Loose the Hounds:* minimalist style, blue-collar narrator, brisk sense of humor, fascination with western locations. This particular story is interesting to Mormon readers because of what the narrator discovers, by accident, after his used-up Monte Carlo breaks down just outside of Logan, Utah, on a Sunday afternoon in early spring. The narrator and his friend and traveling companion, Green, "a guy with long hair and a beard and missing his right hand" (180) walk into town, only to find everything closed and the streets deserted. Green, who has been nervous since they've crossed the border into Utah, breaks his usual silence to inform the narrator that nobody's there to help them because it's Sunday. They travel a little farther, when they hear "singing so beautiful it could break your heart or make you sterile" (181). The narrator is drawn to the music and steps into the chapel, where makes eye contact with Wade, "a kid with a crewcut who doesn't seem to be enjoying himself" (182). "He's got ears like frisbees and nice teeth. He wears a tie and cowboy boots. I've never seen anybody do that before" (183).

Relieved at the chance to leave church, Wade offers to help the two stranded travelers. He allows them to wash his car to earn a little spending money and then provides a picnic lunch along the shore of the Logan River. The conversation during lunch reveals that Green was once a Mormon. Like Wade, he was even involved with Boy Scouts. Once the secret is out, he and Wade seem to pour out their souls to one another. We learn that Green loves the music to hymns but can't remember the words. Wade is having trouble with social pressure designed to get him on a mission. Soon their shared frustrations with aspects of Mormon culture have established a sort of bond. They notice that Wade's dog and the narrator are having a great time playing in the water and decide to join them. "Green's skin is so white it is almost blue. Wade comes up, water rolling off him, sputtering like a kid. He takes Green in a bear hug and dunks him under" (187). As they continue to frolic in the water, the narrator comments that "Green is free and easy, the happiest I've seen him for a long time and I can't help but be happy too" (187).

Wade's last act of charity is to buy the dead Monte Carlo for forty dollars and drop the two travelers along the side of the highway, pointed in the direction of Salt Lake. A ride with an old couple gets them to Salt Lake, where they hook up with a trucker on his way to Phoenix, their final destination, the land of summer construction jobs. "The light is just coming up, turning the snow on the mountains purple and orange. The sky is opening sharp and clear. I can't be sure, but I think a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand" (189).

Let us ask a few questions of this interesting little story about two marginal insiders told from the perspective of an admiring, but perplexed, outsider. I like the story, in part, because it's sneaky. It speaks very differently to the insider and the outsider. The outsider sees the Sunday work and the romp in the river as pure charity, a day of rest stimulated by the good heart of a religious young man. The pharisaic insider (this is my role), though, is tempted to see the same romp as guilty charity for Wade. He turns his back on his duty to listen to and admire sermons and lessons on the Good Samaritan, as well as his obligation to channel his charitable impulses into culturally acceptable conventional expressions of love. Instead, he plays religious hooky. He turns Sunday into a holiday. Or does he? For the insider, the knowing Mormon, that is the question.

Does this story, then, appeal to heart? I think so. Its humor and its point of view appeal to the generosity in our nature. The point of view helps alleviate the cautious fear of strangers that keeps us from reaching out. Of course, I can't help but be nagged by my fear that strangers may just as likely be slasher-drifters or X-File aliens as one-handed ex-Mormons.

Is its appeal to the extreme? I can't say that the story encourages letting go. The passionate extreme of generosity, a kind of spendthrift foolishness, doesn't come into play here at all. Is its appeal to deficiency? The danger to heart in this piece is its flirtation with sentimentality. "Beautiful Places" plays to the conventional critique of Utah Mormons as uptight, rigid zealots, with limited capacity to serve beyond prescribed norms. Just as Mormon stories that celebrate this stereotype are often sentimental, so too the conventional critique. The story teeters on the edge of heavy-handed condemnation of active Mormons as parochial givers who look inward with ease and peace but seldom look outward to serve. It almost succumbs to the temptation to assert that only the marginally active have the freedom to be truly charitable. I would urge *caveat lector*—reader beware.

Does the story appeal to mind? Again, I think it does. It urges intellectual engagement not only with its well-crafted minimalist style, but also through the sneakiness I referred to before—its dual implied audience. It cares about language and is aware of its power. Does the story encourage dogmatism? Again I think the story is not intellectually extreme. Does the story, though, appeal to deficiency? As with heart, the story again teeters on the edge. I believe the story is ultimately more serious for the insider Mormon audience than it is for the broader national audience. We know what's going on. For us, some of the humor borders on light-mindedness—mockery of the sacred. This is a tried and true American way to tell stories, of course, from Mark Twain to Kurt Vonnegut, but Mormons do know that *something* is sacred. A romp in the river in your underwear, even if accompanied by a dog named Robert, isn't really a baptism.

Does the story appeal to soul? Yes. The story urges us to see beyond the failure of its three characters. The narrator and Green are struggling drifters. They drink too much. They waste their money as fast as they earn it. But they are presented as likeable, even good, men. They present no danger to naive young Wade, who leaves the safety of church to help them out. There is no question that Wade is a better man for having spent the afternoon with them and then sending them on their way. And for all of his worries about pressure to serve a mission, Wade still reaches out. He is not self-centered, though he may have left the chapel for selfish reasons.

Does the story appeal to asceticism? No. The story is firmly about serving one's fellow beings. Does the story appeal to materialism? I think the story leans in the direction of trusting the arm of flesh. It glories in the feel of things: "the old car humming beneath your feet, the wind like a woman's fingers in your hair, bearing the smell of pine and fresh water and mint" (179).

> I spray Armor All on the tires and wipe the chrome so clean I can see the pores on my face in it. I try to keep my mind on my work but girls in long dresses walk by and I am instantly distracted. When a breeze blows their skirts about their calves I feel something flutter down the length of my spine. (184)

But you can't escape the feeling that something more lies just beyond the limited perspective of the narrator. And that is why it feels so sad that Green has to move on so quickly, that "a place like this is just a little too beautiful for Green to stand" (189). Is our lovely Deseret just a little too lovely? That is a question worth asking, and Brady Udall asks it pretty well in "Beautiful Places."

Let us turn to Susan Howe's poem.

MOUNTAIN PSALM

We didn't come here to pray
But snow and a brittle skim of ice
Suggest otherwise. And to climb
Is a form of worship: we accept
Someone else's version of the way up;
We trust and follow.

Of course questions, doubts: Why so slight
An incline? all the doubling back
When we might rise? Is a trail
Best for some best for us?
How to reconcile crystal-laden air
With the consequence of sight?

We walk under pines, stiff as elders,
Imposing answers all along our way.
From beneath, they are a density
Allowing now and then
Dusts of brilliance, surprises of light.
But the more we climb, the smaller
They become, an aspect, a deeper green.

And then, the nature of treachery
Or the treachery of nature. Considering
Flaming peaks are tricks of light on ice,

The way up is also the way down,
And we don't transcend but climb,
For what, then, should we pray? Balance,
And the snowy grip of each footfall?

And sun, source of energy and vision,
Metaphor for whom we seek and how.
Father, Mother, give us distance
Through which to see our lives.
Passage to this lookout and a blessing
To perceive the extent and limits of our sight.

From this height, air streams down
To the valley floor, refreshing
The city as it struggles through its haze.
But the city of our dwelling has become
Its own reward, streets locked,
All of the angles right. How rarely
We prevail, vision cleared, above,
Eating apples, bread, and cheese
In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock.
(65-66)

If, as I think, Udall's story appeals primarily to the capacities of heart, it should be fairly apparent that Howe's poem appeals to capacities of mind. It is a meditation on spirituality, but it urges careful pondering as opposed to fervent response.

Writing a poem at the end of the twentieth century about communing with God in nature is a risky enterprise. Such poems have become so conventional, such sentiments so clichéd, that the poet is tempted to sound just like everybody else, just to chime in. By appealing to mind rather than heart, Howe avoids the cliché-ridden alternative. She even informs us in the first stanza that she knows and understands the risk. Thus climbing the mountain becomes a metaphor for worship rather than an act of worship.

The poem becomes a meditation on perspective or point of view, and its influence on faith's ability "to perceive the extent and limits of our sight." Because of time constraints, I will limit my comments to three images that explore the dynamic between point of view and faith. The first is "pines, stiff as elders, / Imposing answers all along our way." I take this to be an image of the rigidity of orthodoxy and those who uphold it. Their authority appears to be constraining, almost frightening, when seen up close. They hinder as much brilliance as they allow. And yet the image also shows that the most rigid tree, even when we stand directly in its shadow, does not so much "allow" "brilliance" or "surprises of light" as it is finally incapable of blocking them. A shift of perspective reveals the pines to be less menacing. They become only an "aspect" and not the essence of experience on the mountain.

The second image is the combination of "sun" and the allusion to "O My Father" in stanza five. Here Jesus is revealed as the object of our faithful search and the model for our seeking. While concerns with orthodoxy in the poem may be topical allusions to contemporary Mormonism, the invocation "Father, Mother" alludes to both past and present. Howe here announces her desire for sisterhood with Eliza R. Snow as Mormon poet on the one hand and as Mormon feminist on the other. She suggests that we and Jesus have heavenly parents and invokes their help in expanding our perspective and increasing our faith.

The final image is the mountain top, "In the clean moment, on the legitimate rock." At this point, Howe has led us up the mountain, invited us to think more deeply about issues of faith and orthodoxy, and admonished us to look more urgently to Christ. This moment above trees and smog is clean because, however briefly, we are standing directly in the light. The rock is legitimate because of its permanence and solidity in relation to the light. To sit or stand on the rock is to be firmly enlightened, rightly inspired. And don't we all understand that Mormon mountain tops are temples of the Most High?

Does this poem appeal either to deficiency or excess of mind? Does it urge light-mindedness or dogmatism? Howe's poem does neither. Much Mormon feminism distorts itself into a dogmatic image of the straw orthodoxy it opposes. Not so here. Rigid opposition to rigidity finds no place in it. And the poem does not descend into the light-minded sentiment that God is found only in nature, that Sunday worship is fulfilling only in the cathedral of the pines.

I guess, finally, what I'm saying is that we need to claim Howe for the virtuous center. Her questions are too reasonable, her beliefs too humble, her gift too spiritual for us to reject her as a truly Mormon writer. Congratulations to Ed Geary, Bert Wilson, and the Redd Center at BYU for publishing this lovely book.

How does one do justice to Eric Samuelsen's *Gadianton* in just a few moments? The play is an extended study of the cancer of business and the harm it does to individuals and communities. Time will not allow me to sketch the plot. For me, the most important character in the play is McKay Todd, an LDS bishop who runs the mail room at Datafine, a large software firm located somewhere in the universe, but where large clusters of Mormons also dwell. Todd runs into a classic Book of Mormon dilemma. And that makes the audience very uncomfortable. Perhaps the hardest, and harshest, Christian critique of conduct is the attack on hypocrites, who "strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:24). The Book of Mormon hearkens back to the Old Testament, as well, in its critique of people who "because they are rich, they despise the poor" (2 Ne. 9:30) and "grind the faces of the poor" (2 Ne. 13: 15; Isa. 3:15). The hypocrisy in the play consists in the rich characters acting as if they care for the poor—their employees and neighbors—until circumstances require them to choose between their neighbors and their money. The play condemns all who choose their profits over their neighbors.

The crucial scene for Bishop Todd comes when he is forced to choose between support for members of his ward (who have relied on him for temporal and spiritual welfare) and his job. To keep his job when others are being laid off has the potential to push him toward selfish hypocrisy. To give up his job will place the welfare of his family, and maybe the strength of his marriage, in serious jeopardy. The character most linked with Gadiantonism in the play, Fred Whitmore, confronts Todd with this impossible choice: Keep your job while a pregnant single mother from Todd's ward, who desperately needs health insurance, loses hers, or give up your job to save her, even though they may lay her off anyway. No guarantees. It is a pure sacrifice with no promise of reward. Whitmore speaks first.

> Fred: Like we shouldn't lay her off. Like we should lay you off instead. Is that the kinda mistake we made? Is it?
>
> Karen: And another 318 for the car payment. 1170 for the house . . .
>
> Brenda: I want this baby, Bishop.
>
> Karen: We need the money, McKay. This is no time for scruples.
>
> Fred: Is it?
>
> Brenda: I can feel her inside me, kicking and pushing . . . and I . . . I wanna hold her. In my arms.
>
> Karen: 700 a month for the twins—
>
> Fred: IS IT?
>
> Bishop Todd: Yes.
>
> Karen: McKay?
>
> Fred: Excuse me?
>
> Bishop Todd: Yes. I'm saying that that's the kind of human mistake you made.
>
> Fred: You're kidding.
>
> Karen: You did what?
>
> Fred: I didn't even mean it serious. Maybe I said it wrong, got you confused.
>
> Bishop Todd: I understood.
>
> Fred: She gets your job. You get the boot.
>
> Bishop Todd: I know.

> Karen: WHY?
>
> Bishop Todd: Because I'm bishop of this ward, Karen. How could I work for a company that just laid off thirty of my ward members? Who I hired? How could I look at them each Sunday?
>
> Karen: (A pause. Terrified.) But what are we going to do?
>
> Bishop Todd: I don't know. (Samuelsen 121-123)

As you can tell from my poor rendition of the scene, *Gadianton* is an intense play. It emphasizes the hardness of the doctrine, and it stretches to unbearable limits the willingness of the audience to imagine correct conduct. The night I watched the play, I could sense the desire of the audience that Todd give up his job. But given a moment to consider what he had actually done, uneasiness settled over the crowd. Samuelsen sets up a dilemma that plays heart against mind. Bishop Todd's alternatives are unreasonable. He seems, therefore, required to make a choice based on feeling—just another example of the false dichotomy between feeling and thought I referred to earlier. I believe, using the terms of the framework, that Samuelsen hopes the paradox will be resolved by inspiration, the capacities of soul.

Let's quickly interrogate the scene. Does it appeal to heart? Most definitely. It emphasizes compassion and the courage that accompanies it. But the compassion called for has consequences that reach beyond our normal expectations. I love my bishop, and my ward expects a lot from him. But I don't think we require him to put his livelihood on the line to serve us. His calling should not require him to change employment. Bishop Todd, though, faces what seem to be unusual circumstances. For good men, work is an extension of family life. Their ability to make a living, to provide, is the measure of their commitment to wife and children. Bishops become bishops, in part, because they are good family men. Bishop Todd, however, is asked to place his family identity in some jeopardy in order to help the helpless. His decision requires faith in his ability to assess what the gospel requires of him. No one else in the play has shown any sign of believing that one should sacrifice temporal security for spiritual benefits. Bishop Todd, though, decides that the gospel requires him to take the risk implied by Jesus' teachings:

> Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matt. 6:31-33)

So Todd's faith in God's promises must translate into courageous conviction. He must act on his beliefs, hoping that acting morally will not harm his more immediate family. He cannot know what the future will bring. He can only move with bold courage to help Brenda and her baby. Such moral courage, according to Samuelsen, is part of the antidote to Gadiantonism. And the play does not save us from the anguish brought on by what may simply be foolish. We don't get to see McKay Todd six months later, with a better job, a brand new car, and a very happy wife. That sort of deus ex machina isn't part of Samuelsen's dramatic universe.

Returning to our framework, does the scene also appeal to mind? Yes. But within limits. Todd's choice certainly requires him to think hard. But the solution to his problems is not simply intellectual. If there were a calculus of charity and compassion, Todd's choice would be easy. Just find the most reasonably charitable alternative and take it. But Todd's choices are unreasonable. To choose one alternative over the other means limiting compassion toward someone. Compassion is also limited by Todd's three primary loyalties. He wears three hats: bishop, husband/father, and supervisor. The play never makes clear which priority takes ultimate precedence over the others. McKay Todd chooses, but with some uncertainty. Ask him to explain his choice, and he will have difficulty offering a rational justification for his decision.

But a rational temptation remains. By having Bishop Todd make a choice, and implying it is the right one, Samuelsen runs the risk of suggesting that bishops should always choose congregation over family, sacrifice over success. Rules of conduct are relatively easy to follow if one version of good conduct does not conflict with another. When categories conflict, the rational temptation is to reify categories and dogmatize the rules of right conduct. It is possible to interpret the play as urging all of us to reject the messy conflicts that arise between the very real worlds of business, neighborhood, and family by just leaving business out. If we go that far, then we turn the play into an example of the virtues of mind taken to the extreme of dogmatism.

I believe the third aspect of the framework, soul, allows us to examine the play in its best light. The scene under discussion certainly appeals to soul. It invites us to think carefully about our relationship to God and how that relationship ought to define our conduct. Many of the conflicts in the play urge us not to forget that we are children of God. Brenda's desire to bear and raise a potentially handicapped child, rather than have the abortion her doctor recommends, brings out the best and the worst in her and her friends and neighbors. She seems to be acting selfishly. Her neighbors judge her. Her bishop helps her to seek God's help. If Brenda and her bishop are acting under inspiration, the choice to keep the child may also have wonderful consequences. For that to have any chance of occurring, though, Bishop Todd must be willing to accept the possibility that her keeping the child will require him to lose his job. The play is constructed well enough that we in the audience take that possibility seriously. Todd's choice is not outlandish, but it is shocking. We are asked to consider whether such inspiration could come from a Heavenly Father who loves us. We are also challenged to test our own faith. Would we do what Bishop Todd does? Would our society be more like Zion if we did act as Bishop Todd does?

At the same time, some of the play's appeals to soul are less adequate. An understanding of our relationship with God must include some awareness of evil. The evil in this play runs the danger of being caricatured. It appears that Samuelsen would have us believe that all business practice is cursed to succumb to the logic of Korihor: that whatsoever a man did, as long as it made a profit, was no crime. Such a view makes evil seem much less complex than the good we've seen dissected in the scene under discussion. That may be so, but the play leaves us feeling that all endeavors whose primary motive is profit are finally evil. On this score, Samuelsen is at least partially supported by no less an authority than Hugh Nibley in his *Approaching Zion*.

But Bishop Todd's choice may imply that evil is just too powerful and must be succumbed to. What if Whitmore plays on Todd's good motives just to fire him? What if Brenda is fired tomorrow anyway? Has evil then triumphed? If the play is to work, genuine evil must be presented and countered. As it stands, the play leaves us hopeful that McKay Todd has made a choice that will be ratified by God, but we're still wondering about how this small act is turning back the tide of the evil corporation. Should we believe that such small acts of courage can combat Gadiantonism? I personally hope so.

I'm sorry to have rushed so quickly over this powerful play. It is a well-crafted work of art that challenges the Mormon audience to consider the conduct of our society in light of the doctrine of the gospel. That is good Mormon literature.

I believe that the most serious Mormon literature will reject the false dichotomy of conflict between thought and feeling. I suspect, however, that most Mormon literature will succumb. On the other hand, I hope that Mormon letters will reject extremes—dogmatism, asceticism, passion. Yet I suspect that our popular culture, like American popular culture, will continue to celebrate deficiency—sentimentality, light-mindedness, materialism—simply because it is easier than the virtuous alternative. I hope that AML will find a way to clarify standards and challenge the culture to move toward moral virtue, that our criticism will not abdicate the responsibility to encourage right conduct and honor literature that does just that.

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VISTING SCHOLAR LECTURE

The Colonization of the Mormon Mind

Richard Lyman Bushman

The title of my talk doesn't shed much light on my topic. This past week, when I told people about the talk, the title mystified them. What can be meant by the colonization of the Mormon mind? The phrase is both inscrutable and ominous. Has the Mormon mind been colonized? Are we under the control of an imperial power without knowing about it?

Because of the obscurity of the title, I want to explain what the talk is about. It has two parts, an autobiographical section and a historical section, which are interrelated. I am going to talk about myself in the autobiographical part to illustrate a point I develop more generally in the historical section.

Let me give you the conclusions now:

1. My historical point is that Mormonism was colonized in the late nineteenth century, in the first instance by the U.S. government and the American merchants, and then subsequently by cultural agents. The fact of colonization is well known to students of Mormon history. After the 1850s, the U.S. government wrested the government of the State of Deseret from the Mormons. The government even dispatched an army to take control from Brigham Young.

Not long after, newly arrived American merchants took over Utah's lines of trade, establishing transportation companies, banks, newspapers, and stores. Especially after the railroad's arrival in 1869, the colonization of the economy went forward at a rapid pace. Brigham Young resisted this commercial invasion, but with only partial success. The outsiders' determination to control trade was not to be thwarted.

To these well-known facts about the Utah government and the economy, I wish to add a cultural dimension. I believe the Mormon mind was colonized along with its government and economy. Emissaries from eastern cultural centers constructed a Mormonism that made the Church and the Mormon people intelligible to the larger American culture and, by so doing, taught us how we should understand ourselves.

These outsiders duplicated a process outlined by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, a volume which inspired this essay. Said argues at great length that the Orientalism of travelers, journalists, and scholars, created over two centuries from the late eighteenth century on, was an aspect of Europe's imperialist expansion into the Far and Middle East. The cultural imperialists created an imagined Orient that Europeans could comprehend, though it was not the actual Orient of the Asians and Middle Easterners themselves—at least not at first.

Gradually the colonized people, especially the intellectuals and middle class, came to think of themselves as the imperialists did, using terms learned from Europe to think about themselves. We thus speak of the colonization of their minds as well as their society.

My historical argument looks for parallels in the cultural creation of Mormonism by eastern journalists, travelers, and scholars who likewise invaded and took over the thinking of

Mormons about themselves.

2. The autobiographical section, which comes first in the paper, tries to show how colonization affected an individual Mormon—what happens to a person caught between the polarities of the Local (in this case Mormonism) and the Metropolitan (the imperial centers in the eastern United States). I want to show how these tensions enter into the thinking of Mormons at a very deep level. In fact in my case, it is the central strain in my psychological architecture.

To narrow the focus, I talk mostly about the way I write, which I call my literary voice. By voice I mean more than the content of the writing. I refer to the way I present myself to readers—something Mormons might call the spirit of my writing—the basic relationship I set up with an audience.

The problem of voice, as you might imagine, forces itself to the front in my current project, a biography of Joseph Smith. Writing on that subject, no author can forget he or she writes for two cultures. On the one hand as a believer, I want to present the Joseph Smith we know and love; on the other hand, I have to write for the educated general public. I want Joseph to be intelligible and attractive to people who read the *New York Times Book Review.* What voice will reach both audiences? In solving this conundrum, I confront my colonized Mormon mind.

I

Whenever I think about voice, my mind goes back to an experience at Brown University where I was a post-doctoral fellow in history and psychology from 1963 to 1965 in between teaching stints at Brigham Young. The Brown program called for the interdisciplinary fellows to teach a familiar course for one semester in the first year and a year-long course in the second year, combining the home discipline (in my case, history) and a new discipline (which I decided should be psychology).

While working on these projects, in the first semester of my first year, I was asked to give a lecture on Mormonism in William McLoughlin's American Social and Cultural History course. To my surprise, preparing the lecture perplexed me. While the subject did not present a problem, voice did. I was uncertain about how to present myself—as an academic or as a Mormon. Presumably the two identities were compatible, but I ran into a problem. What pronoun should I use to refer to the Mormons? Should it be "we", or should it be "they"? Was I a young faculty member and scholar looking on objectively from the outside, or was I a Mormon talking about my people? Was I willing to put myself fully on the side of a religion which I knew the students would think fabulous, if not ridiculous?

In retrospect, I can see that the decision I finally made went back to my upbringing in Portland, Oregon, where my family moved from Salt Lake when I was four. In fact, I think my basic outlook on the Church stems from being brought up in the Mormon diaspora rather than in the heartland. In Portland in the thirties, Mormons were a tiny minority at best. During World War II when our family had no car, we took four different buses to get from our home in Park Rose to the Colonial Heights meeting house in another section of the city. After a while, a little branch was organized in Monteville where we met in an Odd Fellows' hall which had to be swept clean of cigarette butts on Sunday mornings before sacrament meeting. Perhaps a dozen Latter-day Saints attended my high school of 1200 students. We were not even large enough to be called a minority religion. We were a tiny flock, a mere scattering, a speck in a large lump. In Portland, membership in the Church required one to accept the position of a marginal person in the larger society.

The effect on me, I now think, was profound. I never had a sense of Mormonism as a dominant force in society—as one might do in a Mormon farm village or in Salt Lake City. I never thought of the Church as a power in society. However important to me, Mormonism was too feeble to control anything that mattered in the world. I never thought about criticizing the Church or resisting its force. It was not strong enough to oppose. I had to deal with Mormonism's insignificance, not its power. I became accustomed to prizing a belief that the rest of the world ignored. The inner life of my prayers, the community of the Saints, the rich doctrinal creations of Mormon belief meant nothing to everyone else and everything to me. I grew up knowing instinctively that my pearl of great price was invisible to the world.

All this was tested at Harvard where I arrived in the fall of 1949 as a freshman, age eighteen. Although Harvard was another world from Portland, my position relative to the society about me did not change; a Mormon was still marginal. The difference was the beauty and power of cultural life in Cambridge. I loved everything about Harvard—its learning, its clarity, its student society. I was more fully myself there than I had ever been in my life. This was a culture I longed to consume—unlike high school culture in Portland where I was never at home. In a sense I have remained in the orbit of Cambridge culture to this very day. It is what I live and breathe minute by minute in my university life. I still dress pretty much as I learned to dress at Harvard in the fifties—chino pants, blazers, tweeds, button-down shirts, and ties. I have been feuding with Harvard in recent years, but I have never abandoned the intellectual culture of which it is the preeminent American bastion.

So how was I to react when my sophomore tutor in history and science, the noted historian I. B. Cohen, coyly mentioned that some people thought Mormonism was garbage. I knew he was sending me a message; should I listen? Or what about logical positivism, then at its high point in undergraduate culture? I got the impression that the smartest people in the world denied the validity of any fact that could not be sensed and measured. Where did the Mormon God fit into Bertrand Russell's universe? For the first time I felt under assault philosophically. Not that much was said against Mormonism, except for Cohen's dig, but the whole category of religion was thrown into question. To stay in tune with Harvard's culture, I would have to give up on faith. Was I to acknowledge the cultural inferiority of my Mormonism and yield to what was obviously, by Harvard's lights, the overwhelming superiority of Western art, science, and philosophy? How could I, when my inner life was still ruled by my faith, when I had banded with a small circle of fervent LDS undergraduates, and when together we delighted in the effulgence of Mormon doctrine—a rich, thriving, humane world compared to the austere indifference of Bertrand Russell's universe?

The terms of this question were new at Harvard, but not its structure. In Portland, I had been long accustomed to a marginal position. It was no surprise to learn that Mormonism was considered feeble and dim. All my life I had held on to my faith against indifference. I learned early on to believe that, where faith was concerned, the whole world might be wrong and only the infinitesimal collection of Mormons right. When the test came, it was not hard for me to conclude that everyone at Harvard might think Mormonism was garbage and that only I and my compatriots in the Church knew the truth.

Both Portland and Harvard were stocked away in my mind when I had to choose between an academic and a Mormon identity at Brown. The decision was actually not very hard. In the lecture for McLoughlin's course I spoke of "we" the Mormons, even though I risked embarrassment and secret ridicule. In the showdown, Mormonism prevailed over Harvard. The Mormons were my people; and after a lifetime of living as one of them, I was not going to abandon them now in favor of scholarly objectivity.

The choice, of course, was not as clear as I have made it appear. In the lecture on Mormons, I did not give up the academic. I was lecturing in an Ivy League college and spoke a language that McLoughlin and the Brown students understood. I did not sound like a missionary bearing testimony. I made the judgments a scholar would be expected to render about Mormon motivation and the conflicts with American society. I used sociological terms and set the Mormons against their American background. I was, in short, a Mormon talking about his faith in the language of the university. I may have positioned myself outside of academic culture in using a "we" with reference to Mormons, but I did all in my power to marshal academic language for the lecture. I was, in short, an insider outsider. I was talking about my strange beliefs in the language I had learned at Harvard.

All of these experiences lie behind the voice I use when writing about Joseph Smith. A cool and intellectual tone advertises my familiarity with the conventions of scholarly writing. I display a kind of modest sophistication. I detach myself a little from my subject and employ a knowing tone. I am one of you, I seem to be telling educated readers. I was immensely complimented by a critical review from a non-Mormon reader of my Joseph Smith manuscript. The person wrote the publisher that you read along through this volume and suddenly realize "this guy believes all this stuff." That is exactly the reaction I want from non-Mormons: surprise and confusion. I wish to astonish them when I reveal myself as a believer.

II

All of this may help explain why, even before I read Edward Said's *Orientalism,* I had substituted *Mormonism* in the title, knowing just enough about the argument to see a possible fit. To begin with, I identified with Said, though I don't know him personally. He grew up in Palestine and Egypt, not the most resonant cultures in Jewish New York. I felt a kinship because I thought of him as occupying a marginal position in Occidental society while making its culture his own, just as I stood at the edge of the Harvard culture that I loved.

His book argues that western writing on the Orient—which for his purposes he confines to the region between India and Egypt—went hand in hand with the European commercial and political take-over of the region. What purported to be scientific scholarship and objective reporting was actually an effort to absorb the Orient into Western systems of thought, at the same time that Middle Eastern nations were being assimilated into Western governing systems and Western commerce. The Orient of Western novels, travel books, and scholarly treatises was an invention to make those countries intelligible while they were being colonized by the West.

Could it be that Mormonism had been colonized too and that, consequently, we face the same problems of speaking for ourselves as subaltern cultures in the East do? Those thoughts came to mind when I first learned about Said's book.

Said is not saying there was a conspiracy between imperial political powers and the scholarly institutions which produced the Orient. Orientalism is nothing so overt as a calculated scheme. He only claims that writing is always tinged with the writer's political position. European writers could not help but think of themselves as superior to the peoples they found in India or Palestine. The powerful apparatus of imperial governments, the relentless commercial forces, the prolific productive mechanisms of the European economy, and the elaborate civilization of the West made it nearly impossible for visitors from England or France not to think of themselves as encountering cultural inferiors in Cairo and Damascus. Sympathy, kindness, tolerance, and "objectivity" were not enough to overcome the inbred consciousness of being higher or more advanced than the native peoples they met. What made Orientalism hegemonic was this ineradicable consciousness of European superiority. It gave the visitors from the West an unearned cultural authority over their subjects; Western scholars simply knew better than anyone they studied.

I have called Orientalism an invention, a word Said himself does not use. He would insist that the image of the Orient evoked in the outpouring of books and images was not an "airy European fantasy" made from nothing. Scholars, novelists, and painters did not concoct lies or create myths. They created a history of the Orient as all histories are created, by selecting what is deemed to be typical out of the mass of experience and fact. Their cultural position authorized the Orientalists to decide what part was to represent the whole—without consulting the natives. So they came up with a complex array of Oriental ideas: Oriental despotism, splendor, cruelty, sensuality. They domesticated Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdom for local European use, the way Chinese restaurants in the United States devise Chinese dishes for American consumption. Flaubert's brief encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental women, as he understood her. She never spoke for herself—for her emotions or her history. His authority allowed him to speak for her. The resulting imagined Orient was as much a sign of the "authorities'" power as it was of truth. It was not pure fabrication, but it was, as Said says, "an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" (6). It was as much a reflection of Western culture as it was of the society it purported to represent. It showed the Orient as Westerners wanted to see it rather than as people from the East saw themselves.

Said's analysis made all the more sense to me because I was reading Ronald Walker's *Wayward Saints* about the Godbeite movement at the same time that I was thinking of the parallels between Mormonism and Orientalism. The Godbeites were a small group of merchant-intellectuals who were attracted to spiritualism and who, for ten or fifteen years after 1868, tried to reform Mormonism by bringing it more into line with national culture. They seemed to me to be a perfect example of the interlocking imperialist effort to control the culture, trade, and government of an inferior people. The striking fact about the Godbeite movement was the convergence of cultural and commercial influences in the same individuals, a rarity in the formation of Orientalism.

William Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison, leaders of the religious movement, were merchants as well as intellectuals; and their plans to bring Mormonism into harmony with more "advanced" Eastern, liberal culture coincided with their desire to integrate Utah into the national economy. They resisted Brigham Young's efforts to maintain the Church's economic autonomy as vigorously as they urged modifications of Mormon theology and religious practice. They believed that the modernization of theology went hand in hand with the coming of the railroad; both were unstoppable forces. The Godbeites seem to confirm Said's conception of an integrated imperialism that tried to take over the economy and government while processing native culture for consumption in the imperial metropole.

The Godbeites concocted a strange oil-and-water mixture of spiritualism and liberal religion that today seems incongruous, the one superstitious and retrograde, the other forward-looking and reasoned. But the two were more compatible in Godbe's and Harrison's time than they are today. The men encountered spiritualism in the fall of 1868 on a buying trip to New York during a season of turmoil in their spiritual lives. They were losing patience with Brigham Young's restraints on Utah merchants and growing ever more restive under his leadership. Seeking for guidance and resolution, they probably visited a medium in New York City, though they gave no details themselves. Godbe did say they were seeking light and had the "lifelong desire of our souls for tangible, conclusive evidence of a future life" fulfilled (Walker 114).

That desire for "tangible, conclusive evidence" through direct experience with the spirits of the dead made spiritualism attractive to many searching souls in this period. Robert Owen, a professed atheist and socialist, turned to spiritualism for the same reason: it provided concrete proof of an after life. The spiritualists themselves thought their religion was scientific in the sense of being based on evidence. To its adherents, spiritualism was the opposite of superstition. It was rational and modern and compatible with advanced ideas.

Returning to Utah from New York, Godbe and Harrison brought with them enlightened religious ideas to offer to Mormons mired in superstition. The teachings of their otherworldly visitors in New York City, they said, were "to remove superstition and ignorance, and teach us the laws governing the science of revelation" (Walker 119) Besides hearing from biblical prophets and Joseph Smith, the two men were taught by Alexander Humboldt, the German naturalist, who instructed them in the science that would carry mankind beyond evolutionary theory. The authenticity of the Bible and Book of Mormon were put in question; and the Doctrine and Covenants, they said, was not to be fully trusted. Joseph Smith excelled as a spiritual medium; Brigham Young was an inferior prophet who had to be superceded to clear the way for the coming of the "noblest civilization the world had ever seen" (Walker 120). As Ronald Walker sums up the message Godbe and Harrison brought back from New York City, the "new gospel" centered on "eighteenth and nineteenth-century concepts of reasonableness (reason), naturalness (natural law), and human fulfillment (humanism)" (125). In short, the Godbeites' messengers promulgated a spiritualist version of nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism, including a minimization of scripture and an emphasis on reason.

The *Utah Magazine* in which the Godbeites presented their message soon after the return of Godbe and Harrison in late 1868 combined the multiple messages the two men had received in New York: spiritualism, reason, advanced civilization, and skepticism about Mormon revelations and the Church's leadership. Mingled with the religious message in the magazine were essays in favor of fashion and in opposition to Brigham Young's isolationist policies. The magazine made itself an outpost for the nation's commercial forces and an emissary for liberal religious ideas. The hall they erected in Salt Lake City in which they entertained lecturers until 1884 was called the Liberal Institute. The Godbeite aim was to pull down the walls that separated Zion from the nation and to work for integration in virtually every aspect of society, politics, and culture. As Walker says in summing up the mature movement, the Godbeites "styled themselves as apostles of mid-nineteenth-century progress. They were rational, progressive, scientific, and modern" (Walker 179).

Godbe and Harrison were Mormons, not outside scholars and travelers like Said's Orientalists. They worked for reform from within Mormonism, unlike the carpetbag governors and the army of occupation sent from the East to take command of the territory. Plenty of visitors like Richard Burton did come from the outside to observe the Mormons and report their findings. These journalists, travelers, and political officials made a small industry out of the Mormons. But much of the colonization of Mormonism was accomplished by insiders like Godbe and Harrison who came under the sway of Eastern cultural authority and tried to reform Mormonism from within. What links the two is a set of standard ideas about Mormonism, comparable to ideas of Oriental sensuality, cruelty, and despotism. In fact, Teryl Givens has argued in a penetrating analysis that the outsiders' fabrication of Mormonism borrowed some of its most telling ideas from Orientalism: the sensuality of the Mormon harem, for example, or the Mormon prophet-despot. This last was the strongest link between the Godbeites and the outside colonizers; Brigham Young, the tyrant who exercised excessive religious and political power, loomed over the depictions of both insiders and outsiders.

Out of this governing image came other stereotypical figures such as the simple Mormon in the thrall of superstition, the murderous Danite band, captured wives, and corrupt, hypocritical leaders. These figures did not lack foundation in fact; they were no more outright lies than Oriental ideas were. They were, nonetheless, a production of the imperial authority which empowered the colonizers. Just as Flaubert created the Oriental woman from one Egyptian prostitute, the colonizers composed their Mormonism from the facts which they deemed to be representative. It did not matter that they told only a fraction of the story. Their cultural authority enabled them to make their selections stand for the whole. Mormons were never permitted to speak on their own behalf. It was assumed that observers with a metropolitan perspective could tell the truth about Mormonism better than the Mormons themselves. Collusion between insiders like the Godbeites and visitors from the East added to the persuasiveness of the Mormonism they jointly created. Even today, outside writers rely on enlightened insider informants to help them get a line on Mormonism.

The recruitment of colonizing agents among the Mormons was inevitable, given the immense power of the larger American society compared to the tiny band of Mormon settlers lodged in the mountains on the western fringes of American settlement. Only if the United States had not taken an interest in the Rocky Mountain region could the Mormons have remained isolated. But with political and commercial forces taking over the Great Basin, cultural influences of all kinds first seeped and then poured into Utah, especially after the completion of the railroad. The Saints' effort to create a distinct Zion society and culture was bound to suffer interference from the centers of American power in the East.

Merchants were the most natural agents of imperial culture given their necessary commerce with the outside world. They benefitted personally from the assimilation of Mormons into American values and tastes. There had to be some homogenization before Mormons would want the merchandise flowing westward from American mills and factories. Personal interest made the merchants sympathetic to the ideas, outlook, and respect for metropolitan civilization that came with the goods.

In succeeding years, others took the place of Godbe, Harrison, and the first generation of colonizing merchants. Academics like Ralph and W. H. Chamberlin, an entomologist and mathematician/geologist respectively, had their own form of commerce with the dominant culture—through books rather than merchandise. Both brothers found the force of scientific culture impossible to resist. They valiantly strove to reconcile their backward and unscientific religion with their sense of the irresistible power of scientific reasoning. Tragically for them, they could not bridge the gulf. Eventually W. H. Chamberlin had to leave Brigham Young Academy when he came under pressure from suspicious Church authorities.

Looking at the broad picture of a powerful national culture in the East looming over a small, backward religious society in the West, we can see that episodes like the Chamberlin controversy were only to be expected. In fact, the polarization of Mormon society is an instance of a phenomenon common in modern history. Drohr Wahrman, the English historian, has described a similar process in eighteenth-century Britain, where the force of London culture broke in upon provincial cities and divided the elites into cosmopolitans and provincials. Wahrman argues that the split was a fundamental divide that accounts for political strains in English society better than social class or political ideology. The English example suggests that the colonization of Utah may have been one instance of a process that went on in Europe as well as in European colonies around the world. Wherever its influence reached, the metropolitan polarizes a colony or province internally as well as assaulting it from the outside. Some within the native society will throw in their lot with imperial authority; others will try to mediate between the provinces and the capital, wanting the benefits of both; still others will resist.

III

While probably beneficial in the long run, the colonization of Mormon society has not been a happy experience for the people involved. The colonizing agents who ally themselves with imperial culture lead frustrating lives of quiet or noisy desperation. They bemoan the blindness of the benighted Mormon population for failing to recognize the superior wisdom or taste of the greater culture. They put an ironic distance between themselves and the Mormon Church when they address the larger world, wanting to be sure no one outside will mistakenly think they believe all that stuff. They mount campaigns to set the Church right or to educate the population. In private among themselves, they share bemusement at the backwardness of the poor credulous Mormons; but they cry while they laugh, because many love the Mormons and are unable to escape the ties that bind. They become downhearted when their campaigns of enlightenment get nowhere.

The provincials for their part feel endangered by the invasion of imperial culture. They recognize its immense authority and fear its capacity to seduce believers. Sensing the scorn of the imperial culture, the Mormons struggle for respectability despite their beliefs. They rationalize their doctrines to make them acceptable to the superior culture, contorting their views to make them fit. Like all defensive provincials, they boast of their greatness in the "eyes of the world" at one moment, and repudiate its corruption at the next.

This is the way I size up the colonization of Mormonism over the past century and a half, but remember I am saying all this within the framework of my own autobiography. While I believe in the truth of the analysis, I know that like all histories it is but one reading of the Mormon past and relies on the selection of representative examples, just as Said's Orientalists did.

There are other ways of thinking about Gentile culture that configure the relationship with the outside world quite differently. Some Mormons think the scientific and liberal assessment of Mormonism is only hard-headed realism which their fellow Mormons must confront, whatever the consequences, as in the classic formulation of faith versus reason. These people think Mormons hide their head in the sand when they resist the criticisms of the greater culture. Other Mormons prefer to think of high culture as embodying beauty and truth that should be absorbed in the spirit of the thirteenth article of faith, rather than as an alien outlook that distorts and undermines Mormonism. Scholarly types may think that the introduction of American economic and intellectual forces into Utah is simply the result of impersonal historical forces, and not the imposition of imperial power at all. Casting Mormon relations with the broader American and European culture as a form of imperialism gives an paranoid twist to events. I can see the merits of these positions, and at times assume them myself. But reading our history as colonization reminds us of the power element in eastern and western relations. We should not forget that Mormonism remains a small minority facing a massive cultural force that inevitably exercises its immense power to get its way.

I hold to the colonization theory despite flaws that I can see myself. For example, I know that the word "colonization" is pejorative. In 1999, no one wants to be on the side of imperial power, the cause of the devils in the modern reading of history. Yet that is what I have done to all those good souls who think of themselves as enlightened and reasonable, standing for good taste against bad, promoting liberal and progressive policies, moderating Mormon authoritarianism, and defending freedom and individuality. I demean these well-meaning people when I label them imperialists.

Perhaps in recompense I can moderate one untoward implication of colonization theory. Said's concept of Orientalism implies the existence of an authentic Palestinian or Egyptian voice that speaks for itself rather than being spoken for. These muffled voices, Said seems to be saying, should be heard. If Flaubert was wrong about Oriental women, let those women tell their own stories. Clear away the underbrush, and let the people of the indigenous cultures step forward. If Godbe and Harrison misread Mormonism, we should let the Mormons speak for themselves.

But where are the authentic Mormon voices? Who speaks for our culture, then or now? The old *Relief Society Magazine, Exponent II*, addresses in General Conference, testimony meetings, Sunday School manuals, personal prayers, private journals, transcripts of disciplinary councils, Primary teachers, Primary children? Where can we hear true Mormon voices?

I think this is a question worth pursuing, if only to turn literary attention to sources we may dismiss as too trivial or merely official or narrowly particular. But that being said, we must be realistic about the hunt for the true native voice. We will never identify an authentic Mormon voice—if by authentic we mean a voice without taint of imperial culture. I think it is safe to say that none exists.

The language of the broader American culture has percolated into every form of Mormon speech. FARMS, the academic institution most dedicated to defense of the faith, rests its case on Enlightenment rationality. FARMS aims to turn back the invaders using their own weapons, a tribute to the power of modern scientific rationalism in the minds of these stalwart soldiers of the faith. Everywhere we turn, we hear deep-dyed Mormons formulating their faith in an awareness of the broader culture. No one is more influenced by the great culture than myself. My strategy, as I said at the outset, is to speak for Mormonism in the language of Harvard. Like everyone else I have been colonized.

It is impossible—and probably unnecessary—to be liberated completely from our imperial past. Mormons are forbidden to cloister themselves, and how can we keep in touch with the world except by using its language? But if liberation is beyond our reach, I think we can attain a degree of post-colonial sophistication.

Consciousness of colonization may grant us a little freedom from its influence. If we cannot destroy the authority of imperial culture, we can name it and examine it. We need not be naive about the mechanics of power. Said said that he hoped "to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, [show] the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others" (25). Similarly, I hope we will not be cowed by the structures of cultural domination, and will voice our Mormonism more freely, more imaginatively, and more faithfully.

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The Power of Epideictic Narratives: Mormons Learn How to Behave and Who to Be

Robbyn Thompson Scribner

We Mormons love to tell stories. From our first days in Primary we hear numerous tales about Bible and Book of Mormon heroes or regular kids like us, who are always either making right choices or suffering the consequences of making wrong ones. Narratives are the teaching tools of choice among adults as well. General Conference talks and Church magazine articles abound in faith-promoting narratives. In the majority of these stories the message is very clear: those who follow the laws of God will be rewarded, and those who do otherwise will be punished (either by God, nature, or themselves).

To a large extent, many of these narratives function as epideictic [ep-i-DIE-tik] rhetoric, or the discourse of praise and blame. Traditionally, *epideictic* is the name given to the types of speeches used in formal settings where an orator praises a person or an institution to a friendly and receptive audience. Epideictic discourse can have many functions, but one of its primary uses is to unite a community through a reminder of and recommitment to their shared values. In his essay, "The Epideictic Function of Narrative," Greg Clark explains that "we might best understand the rhetorical function of narrative in terms of the function of epideictic rhetoric" (1), which is very applicable in the case of many of the religious narratives shared by Mormons. In this paper, I will offer a discussion of how Mormons use epideictic narratives in an attempt to solidify their community, using an autobiography written by a Mormon polygamous wife, Martha Cragun Cox, as a case study. I will conclude by looking at some of the ethical implications of this traditional type of discourse and exchange (that of sharing epideictic narratives) in the Mormon community.

In his *Rhetoric,* Aristotle defines the epideictic as "panegyrical or declamatory speeches, in the nature of an exhibition or a display, eulogies–in general, speeches of praise (or blame)" (qtd. in Cooper 17). This is basically the extent of his definition; his remaining discussion on the epideictic consists of advice for orators about how to deliver effective speeches. Aristotle says very little about the purpose or rhetorical function of the epideictic; and, as a result, many theorists throughout the past two thousand years have argued that the epideictic had no practical function, believing that it was somehow less useful, and therefore less important, than the other types of discourse described by Aristotle.

However, in the 20th century several scholars have begun to reexamine the epideictic, arguing that there is more to the discourse than communal back-patting. Chaim Perelman has been one of the most influential scholars in revising the definition and the general understanding of epideictic rhetoric. In his *The New Rhetoric,* coauthored with Olbrechts-Tyteca, Perelman adds to Aristotle's discussion of epideictic by arguing that, in contrast to the ideas of many traditional theorists, discourse is indeed central to persuasion and that an epideictic rhetor has the specific goal of winning the audience to his aims (49). In answering those who had argued that the epideictic was relatively useless because it did not move a group toward action, Perelman observes that the epideictic "strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing the adherence to the values it lauds" (50). Perelman paved the way for other scholars who have also begun to see the epideictic differently. By establishing the epideictic as a persuasive form of discourse, scholars have made room for the argument that it can indeed be practical, impelling its listeners toward action.

Another scholar exploring the function of epideictic is Dale Sullivan, who says, in distinct contrast to those who believed that the epideictic has no real practical function at all, that the epideictic revolves around a "constellation of purposes: preservation, education, celebration, and aesthetic creation" (116). Other scholars have argued that the epideictic has the potential to unite a community in its commitment to shared values and to even shape and redefine those values for the said community (Sheard). Many of the traditional epideictic narratives shared in the Mormon community function along those same lines, as is certainly the case with many of the narratives in Martha Cox's autobiography.

Traditional epideictic encounters are usually considered to exist in real time: a skillful speaker addresses a large audience orally (or at least through a written text with a contemporary readership); and in those moments, some kind of solidarity can be achieved. Yet, as Sullivan recognizes, epideictic rhetoric can "transcend time" (126). Of course, his discussion of this phenomenon is largely metaphorical, meaning that the ideas typically addressed in epideictic speeches are timeless and otherwise "permanent" principles (Walker 8). Yet this timeless quality of the epideictic has a literal application as well. Epideictic encounters can indeed span boundaries of both time and space, as epideictic discourse is recorded and rediscovered at a later date. Many of the written epideictic expressions of 19th-century Mormon polygamous wives fall into this category. One of the most common venues Mormon women used to write about their experiences with polygamy was in their personal histories. Although autobiography is not typically considered a genre in which epideictic discourse is used, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle argues that a religious autobiography (such as the one written by Martha Cox) will often be epideictic in nature (26).

Martha Cragun Cox was a Mormon polygamous wife who recorded her life history in 1929, at the age of seventy-seven, three years before her death. She addressed her story to her descendants, hoping it would continue to be read years after her death, in a rhetorical setting which was in many ways different from traditional situations of the epideictic. Epideictic rhetors, as we traditionally think of them, speak in real time with their audiences, and the unity between speaker and audience can be understood in terms of that literal coexistence. Although Cox never meets her audience in a literal space, she still achieves a certain kind of unity with her audience. As Bitzer notes, certain types of historical documents can still exist as rhetorical expressions and–in this case, I am arguing, as epideictic rhetoric–because "they speak to situations which persist–which are in some measure universal" (13). A rhetorical interaction can still take place even if the rhetor and her audience are distanced by time and space.

For Martha Cox, this persistent situation was her desire for all her descendants to be committed to the Restored Church, regardless of its demands. However, because she was literally distanced from her audience, many traditional epideictic strategies would be insufficient to achieve the common goals of this type of rhetoric. To bridge this gap, Cox relies heavily on sharing vivid personal narratives, which, in this case, enable the functions of an epideictic encounter. Many of her vignettes work as epideictic rhetoric; although they create a variety of ways, two functions demand particular attention in looking at the epideictic in a Mormon setting. First, through example, these stories dictate certain patterns of righteous behavior which the audience is implicitly urged to adopt. Second, through the process of identification, the epideictic narratives invite the audience to join in a collective identity, shared by all righteous Mormon women, which is defined by their adherence to the values which the stories represent.

One of the ways Cox uses narrative to prescribe righteous behavior and to describe an ideal Mormon woman is to share faith-promoting stories about the self-sacrificing women she came in contact with. One of her sister wives had buried "her last three babies" so she took Martha's children, and those of the other wives as well, "to her bosom" (123). Cox shares her belief that "many times [this woman] had been grieved and even felt heart broken under her trials of plural marriage and poverty"; but when she asked "Auntie" about this idea, the woman replied, "Whenever my heart comes between me and my Father's work it will have to break. And if you have not learned that lesson the sooner you learn it the better for you." Cox's response to this reply was simply, "Glorious women! [sic] No better ever lived. Israel never produced a better Latter Day Saint" (124).

Clearly Cox is telling this story to teach her descendants a lesson about how all Mormon women should behave in the face of trial. By teaching this message through narrative, however, she allows her readers to see and hear the principles at work. Walter Fisher asserts that "the operative principle of narrative rationality is identification" (66), which indicates that these descriptive narratives have the potential to enable the readers to identify with these faithful women, no matter how far they were removed from them physically and, in the case of polygamy, situationally. Cox's use of these types of stories allows her readers not only to learn how they should act in a variety of situations but, through the principle of identification, invites them to define themselves in accordance with their lives, joining together in a unified identity of the faithful Mormon woman.

Cox uses narratives in an even more dramatic way as she discusses the enemies of polygamy. Throughout her autobiography, Cox demonstrates her belief that those who actively try to repress plural marriage will be punished by God. She communicates this idea by sharing numerous vivid anecdotes, powerful tools for identification, about her experiences with the enemies of polygamy. Two of these anecdotes are particularly striking. In the first, Cox recounts her experience on a camping trip with some friends:

> I no sooner took my station at the fire than Mrs. Vance commenced a tirade on Polygamy and Polygamists generally. Blamed B.Y. [Brigham Young] for his many wives and the silly men who followed his example. Then turned her tirade on to the prophet Joseph Smith for introducing the principle. At the time she was holding a piece of broiling bacon over the coals. When she referred to the Prophet in such scandelous [sic] terms I could not restrain myself from saying "You ought to have your tongue burned." I hardly felt responsible for my words . . . for I felt I had told the truth. At the suggestion she raised the broiling slice of bacon on her fork and laid it full length on her tongue. . . . She gave a deadly scream and I ran

> to our wagon jumped in and covered myself with quilts. . . . When we drove out of camp she was sitting on the wagon tongue with a wet towel pad on the burned organ. (114)

Clearly, this fascinating story supports Cox's underlying belief that polygamy is a true principle ordained by God. By recording this experience, Cox suggests to her readers how they should behave when faced with the temptation to mock the doctrines of God. Like all good Sunday School stories, this shows the wicked being directly punished for her actions. More importantly in this context, however, Cox shows her readers that, because of her own personal devotion to live and support the law, she is endowed with some sort of supernatural power of suggestion. Because of her obedience, she has been given the privilege to invoke the intervention of God in punishment of those who speak ill of his divine doctrines and fail to recognize the righteousness of those who have sacrificed to live those principles.

Of course, although Cox uses the example of standing up for polygamy, which was perhaps the most important gospel principle of her era, this same power could come from any similar situation. A careful reader, naturally identifying with Cox because of the force of the narrative itself, would surmise that this power could be given to any committed Mormon woman, not just one who was committed particularly to the principle of polygamy. In this way, the narrative invites the reader to join Cox in her portrayal of what it means to be a righteous woman. She is one who stands up against evil and is victorious. The reader learns that if she will behave in the same way, she may be counted with the righteous–privileged to identify herself as a faithful Mormon woman.

A later story reiterates this same theory in a slightly different way. After a lengthy discussion of all the injustices which the polygamists have had to suffer at the hands of government officers, Cox openly expresses her rage:

> I said in referring to McGeary who had been accustomed to act unfeelingly with the plural wives, "Every bone in his body should be broken", and this was his fate, suffering with a fever he walked out of a high window in an Ogden hotel and the account published in the paper stated that every bone in this body was broken. (131)

Although this story shares obvious similarities within the tongue-burning incident, in many ways it is even more powerful. In the first, Cox speaks directly to her enemy, and her real power comes through her verbal suggestion. In this story, Cox has no literal contact with the victim, yet the implications are the same. Cox clearly believes that the curse she placed on McGeary was realized, indicating her belief that God recognizes her self-sacrificing devotion to divine principles; and because of it, her righteous desires will be granted. In disclosing this story, Cox makes it obvious how she believes righteous people should behave, and this message is clear to her audience.

In addition, Cox invites her readers to identify with her as they take in these powerful narratives. In spite of the remarkable nature of both these stories, Cox relates them both in a matter-of-fact manner. The vignettes are interwoven among the more quotidian details of her life, and Cox makes no further discussion of the implications which accompany them. By sharing the stories in such a way, Cox implies that, although they certainly demonstrate her personal righteousness, they are not remarkable in any other way. Again, although Cox never explicitly says so, she implies to her readers that this righteous power can belong to anyone who is fully committed to obeying the laws of the restored gospel. By showing her readers the power that comes from righteousness (in distinct contrast with the punishment that lies in store for the wicked), Cox invites her readers to join her in her unselfish commitment to be counted among the righteous Mormon women of any era, regardless of what sacrifices are required to make that commitment manifest.

All of these descriptive narratives (in addition to numerous others in the rest of the autobiography) serve two purposes: First, they clearly dictate a certain pattern of behavior: righteous Mormons will strictly follow the laws of God and resist their enemies. Second, the narratives encourage her audience to identify with Cox's strong persona thus presented. By vividly showing the privileges which inevitably follow personal sacrifice, Cox summons her readers to first identify with her, and then to join her in accepting that identity as a woman wholly committed to the restored Church–regardless of the cost, as their own.

In a distinct type of public setting, different from those in which the epideictic is typically used, Cox invites her audience to adopt certain patterns of behavior to identify with her and to adopt the identity she has established for herself. Yet, because of her literal distance from her audience, Cox primarily used narratives to engage her audience in an epideictic encounter. Instead of explicitly stating that she shares a common heritage and worldview with her audience, Cox instead tells powerful stories which show them the blessings and benefits she has herself received by adopting that worldview. Unable to take advantage of a literal proximity to her audience to promote identification, she closes the gap of time and space through the use of compelling narratives, invoking what Martha Nussbaum calls the "literary imagination" which allows the reader to enter "imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation" (xvi).

By sharing vivid and powerful personal narratives, Cox invokes the literary imagination of her readers, which enables her readers to "form bonds of identification and sympathy" (Nussbaum, 7) with the persona she has created in her autobiography. She then leaves it to her readers to come to the decision on their own that they will join her in that identification as committed members of the restored Church, willing to do whatever is asked of them. As Lockwood notes, it is "characteristic of epideictic speech to figure its readers as future speakers and doers" (30), which is precisely what Cox has done in her autobiography. After carefully defining her own very specific (and somewhat ideal) identity in such a way that her readers could strongly identify with her, she implicitly urges them to become future doers–to modify their own behavior in such a way that they will be able to join her in becoming a united people, defined by their covenant relationship with God.

In her discussion of the power of the literary imagination to enable identification, Nussbaum primarily focuses on its positive potential. Certainly, it can work in a positive way. I know that as I have listened to my own grandmother's stories I have felt inspired and enriched, and I'm sure many of Martha Cragun Cox's descendants feel the same way. Yet, as Clark notes, we need to be wary of the immense power of these narratives. He asserts that, when a community is "invited to make themselves over in the image of these anecdotes, they are propelled toward an intensity of consent beyond that developed by the persuasion of argument" (4). If we allow ourselves to become too caught up in these stories, we become largely unable to subject them to any meaningful critique (Clark 5). In short, use of the epideictic presents ethical questions that must be dealt with responsibly.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, we still use narratives much as Cox used them in her autobiography. As we share stories in Church and read them in the *Ensign*, we are dictating proper behavior for our community as well as proclaiming who we are as a people. But if, because of the sheer identifying force of these narratives, we are largely unable to critique our position, we are likely to become bigoted and exclusive. In "official" Mormon settings, we share only certain types of stories, such as those ones I have highlighted in this paper. There are very few examples of wrong choices being made by righteous people; the just are always praised and the unjust are always punished. These kinds of stories largely dictate who is an insider and who is an outsider in the Mormon community. If you behave like the heroes, you will be rewarded; if you succumb to temptations, you will be punished.

The problem with sharing these types of powerful narratives is that, since we are all human, no Mormon can ever live up to the ideals represented in the stories. Some of us do better than others, perhaps; but sooner or later, each of us will make a bad choice. When these epideictic narratives have established a clear identity for those who should truly belong to the community, what happens when individuals can no longer find a way to identify with those idealized stories? An epideictic speaker, with group unity as her primary goal, may actually end up fragmenting her society, leaving its members feeling alienated and plagued with guilt instead of inspired.

Mormons have always recognized the potential power of narratives in teaching the gospel, prescribing righteous behavior, and uniting a community. However, we also need to recognize that, because narratives are so powerful, they may work in ways we had not anticipated. We need to be more aware of this factor so that we will be better able to make sense of our lives as Mormons when we cannot absolutely identify with the faith-promoting stories we hear and share. And to truly represent the members of our community, we need to be willing to share a wider variety of stories, ones in which people come closer to representing themselves as they truly are, complete with weaknesses and sins. As we expand our repertoire of acceptable anecdotes and work to critique the stories we tell, these narratives have a greater chance of filling their purpose, to truly inspire and unite the members of the Church.

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Esther Ann and Me: An Essay into Boundaries

John Bennion

My great-great grandmother Esther Ann Birch Bennion lived during serious antagonism over polygamy between the Mormons and the Federal government. As a second wife, she had strong reason to mistrust and perhaps hate Gentiles. However, her philosophy, as recorded in minutes of the fourth meeting of the Vernon Ward Relief Society, is tolerant:

> Sister Esther Bennion said that in our daily life we stood on either side of a wall, which had Latter-Day Saints on one side and gentiles on the other. It was in our power to erect that wall so high that we should not be able to see over it, not be able to distinguish truth from error. (2 March 1877)

I have long puzzled over the meaning of these sentences. One attribute of a strong community, tribe, religious group, or nation, according to conventional wisdom, is distinct differences from those outside the boundary. Esther Anne's statement seems to contradict that social reality.

When she made the statement, she lived in Vernon, which was then and is now a village in the far southern end of Rush Valley in Tooele County, Utah. Like many Mormon settlements, the town is isolated, surrounded by high, basin-and-range desert. Her words can be a basis for exploring the nature of community, which I define as people living harmoniously in a place.

Esther began her life in a classed society and ended it in a hierarchical one, but most of her extant poems and letters embody her basic belief that all people are valuable to God. Born Esther Birch in 1833 in Selsted, County Kent, England, she went into service as a maid when she was twelve (Rogers 28). She was bashful or proud enough that when asked to clean the floor on her first day of work, she spent hours on hands and knees washing it with a small rag. Someone later showed her the long-handled mop that would have saved her many aches. According to family tradition, she learned to read by studying newspapers which had been pasted upside down on the walls of an outhouse at her place of employment.

She converted to Mormonism in 1852, after the elders anointed her frostbitten feet and prevented amputation (Rogers 29). She immigrated to America in 1855, then walked across the Great Plains to Salt Lake City. Brigham Young, eternal matchmaker, thought "she would make a fine wife for John Bennion," already married to Esther Wainwright. (29). Brigham Young sealed them in his office in 1852, but they were resealed in 1857 after the Endowment House was completed. Brigham Young added "Ann" to Esther's name to distinguish her from John's first wife. The family lived together in the house at Taylorsville, experiencing the tension natural to two wives in a small house. In 1863, John, looking for new grazing land, homesteaded in Rush Valley (46). Esther Ann and John's third wife, Mary Turpin, took turns living at the homestead, Mountain Home, in extreme isolation. In 1868, John took her with him to the Muddy River Mission east of St. George in Nevada. During that time she wrote to her brother-in-law, "Your style or mode of writing is so superior that I hope to be able to learn something from it. I do not expect to ever make a good writer but I wish you would keep one of my letters and if we are not all changed from mortal to immortal compare them five years from now and see if I have profited by corresponding with you" (147). She was left to manage the sheep herds and the homestead while her husband was on a mission to Wales. She described the Muddy Mission as: ". . . a strange country to live in, everything has thorns on it which tear our clothes to rags, and the ground is almost covered with little prickles and rocks making it impossible for any to go barefoot except around home. . . . There is more society here, but I felt bad to leave our home in L. Valley. . . ." (142). They returned to their home in Northern Utah in 1873. When John died in 1877, Esther Ann inherited the home in Vernon and one third of the sheep and cattle. She and her son Israel together managed the operation.

The part of her life with which I am mostly concerned were her mature years, when, after experience as a servant, plural wife, solitary pioneer, and member of several communities, she became a respected member of the town, something like the poet laureate of Vernon. She became proficient enough to be chosen in 1893 as one of three poets whose work was printed in the *Utah Album of Poets,* a volume prepared for the World's Fair in Chicago (84).

During the 1870s, when she made her statement in Relief Society about building walls so high that we no longer know the difference between truth and error, members of the church were urged to maintain a distinct nature. On 27 May 1882 a Sister Delaman, a member of the Vernon Ward, said:

> We were gathered from several nations of the earth and all had come here for the same purpose and therefore we should instruct each other and be united. Our mission is great and requires many hands to perform it. We should not listen to the outside world but let them plan, for if we live our religion other endeavors to harm us will be as not. (Minutes)

The rhetoric in these minutes and in general writing by Mormons during this time of tension is "us" and "them," Gentile and Mormon. On 5 November 1882, for example, a sister "[e]xhorted the sisters to patronize our friends and not our enemies" (Minutes). From the beginning Mormons have seen themselves as a people apart, defined by their peculiarity, asserting their religious identity in opposition to the Gentiles.

Most of Esther Ann's poems endeavor to strengthen community. Generally she stresses *overcoming* differences as the method of shoring up community—consoling parents at the loss of a loved one ("Dear Little Maud of the sunny hair, / Why did you come to this world of care / Only to stay for so short a time?"); advising relatives and members of her ward ("Dear girl, might I give thee / a rule for life" and "Don't mimic us children, our language I know / Is not quite according to rule"); giving hope ("We start across life's sea with shout and song / Gathering our cargo as we sail along / Good deeds, kind words, dear friends, / bright gems of thought, / these are among the treasures to be caught"): interpreting doctrine ("Thy piteous 'questionings' touch an answering chord / Within my breast, which fain would breathe reply"); and expressing devotion ("No one can come between me and my God / None can hide me from His glorious face"). Clearly she tried to make her poetry aesthetically pleasing but the deepest aim was to ameliorate the natural divisions between people who were yoked together in the gospel but descended from divergent national and class backgrounds. The Vernon community included citizens who were Swedes, Danes, Brits, Germans, Italians, and long-time U. S. families.

I have divided her poems into the following categories: Sermons in Verse, Dedications and Dialogues, and Occasional Poems.

SERMONS IN VERSE

In "Stars and Flowers" (1881), Esther Ann defends the importance of children and the weak to the larger community:

> But if all the stars were brilliant and bright,
> The flowers all climbed to the ivy's height
> And none for the little ones low and sweet
> The picture I think would be incomplete. (8)

Many of her poems follow this same pattern of asking the reader to consider the value of those who are lowest in the kingdom. She does not imply that the hierarchical Mormon society is at fault, but rather that each person has his or her proper level. Recognizing that every individual is important contributes to the community's sense of unity. In "The Promise" (1896) she urges, "O, Saints, stand side by side" (2). Whether an individual is high or low in the kingdom, all are progressing, all are undertaking a common enterprise. In "Climbing the Ladder" (1882) she writes:

> There are so many climbing with me
> We'll lend each other a hand. . . . (29)

In another cluster of poems she shores up community by illuminating the forces which might divide people. In "Stand Side by Side," she describes the fragmenting influence of unrighteous judgment:

> If God should judge us as we judge another,
> How hard our lot would be.
> How much it would increase our heaviest trial.
> And every pain renew.
> If loved ones pass us by with cold denial.
> And friends should prove untrue. (2)

In addition to unrighteous judgment, unrighteous dominion could destroy feelings of unity in both families and the wider community. In "Response" (1874) she voices her concern that in the Gentile nation men marry for the money a woman might have and that after this and other conquests a man might disrespect the woman. Of greater concern is her discovery that some holders of the Mormon priesthood are "utterly heartless" and follow the practice of the Gentiles. Still she asserts that women may hope for an "ideal man true and noble,"

> A man who is shield and protector,
> A counselor, monitor, friend.
> Who loveth a Woman as Woman,
> And not as a means to an end. (23)

During polygamous times, one index to a man's righteous dominion was the number of wives and children he possessed. Esther admires a man who loves his wives for more than that selfish end.

Two subcategories of poems that preach a sermon are elegies, which strive to restore faith in God's plan, and devotional poems, which praise God directly. She used both these forms to unify her audience in their confidence that they are God's children, members in his kingdom. For example, in "Written in a Space Left for Baby's Picture" (1885):

> Thy mission here to us, was given
> To draw us nearer God and heaven. (22)

In other elegies—including "Maud Valencia Squires" (date uncertain), "In Memory of Rachel Griffiths" (1876), "Harriet Bennion Harker" (1876), and "In Memory of Sister Esther Young" (1906)—she comforts the bereaved and gives her assurance that a righteous life brings the hope of reunion. In a few purely devotional poems, she comforts herself and others with assurance that her faith will bear fruit. In "Our Trust Is in God" (1884), she writes,

> No one can come between me and my God
> None can hide me from His glorious face. (6)

These poems have the rhetorical purpose of shoring up community, of persuading people that unity is more important than selfish dominion over another, that those who participate in the unity of faith will find rewards in heaven. In the following category she praises or reconciles herself to a specific person, breaking down the barriers between specific individuals. These are poems of reconciliation, bringing unity—relationship by relationship—back into the community.

DEDICATIONS AND DIALOGUES

In "Affection"she tries to reconcile herself to an unnamed woman. She writes:

> Could you forget my cruel behavior,
> And take me back to your heart once more?
> Could you drive from your heart all malice,
> Love me as freely and truly again. . . . (5)

At the end of the poem, she vows that she will "never more cause you sorrow and pain," hoping to bring back into the bond of sisterhood this woman she has offended.

In another cluster of poems, she encourages women who have been alienated by others. Of necessity in a hierarchal society, some people will feel slighted. The following poem is designed to comfort her sister wife, Mary Turpin. Several times during their marriage to John Bennion, they were asked to leave the main family home near Taylorsville, where the first wife, Esther Wainwright resided and ran her weaving business, and establish family outposts elsewhere. John's ambitions resulted in a wide cattle and sheep operation, ranging from Taylorsville to Bingham to Rush Valley and to the San Rafael Swell. The central home was a bustling busy place, with many children and other visitors about. The cabin in Bingham and later the southern extremity of Rush Valley were lonely places, outside the main society of the family and the Church. The two sister wives were probably asked to move out to the frontier of their operation out of economic necessity, but another cause of their forced isolation may have been tension between them and the first wife. In "To Mary" (1866) Esther writes:

> We sometimes feel as if shut out
> From friends and kindred dear
> Yet this is but a moment's thought
> Our duty calls us here. (12)

Duty to the community, the unity forged from having the common purpose of building God's kingdom on earth, is more essential than their temporary feelings of isolation. In the eternities they would be reunited.

In "To Jean from Grandma," she tries to bridge a physical distance of separation between herself and a beloved grandchild, who has moved away. She reassures the child that she is thinking of her:

> Tho' hands must sever and lips will quiver
> And the "moving specks" seem further away
> Yet the grand old mountain, the beautiful river,
> Are spanned by our thoughts that cross each
> day. (23)

Common thoughts unify grandmother to grandchild, but another unifying force is the physical landscape. All these poems try to bring unity to the faithful who are separated physically.

Another kind of isolation inside a community could be caused by loss of faith, which would be terrifying to those for whom the fellowship of the Saints is essential. In several poems, she attempts to answer religious questions asked by others. In "To Lu Dalton" (1878) she writes to a woman who has felt weighted down by male authority:

Thy piteous "questionings" touch an answering
chord
Within my breast, which fain would breathe reply
If I perchance by some low, gentle word
Might help to soothe thy spirit's yearning cry. (16)

She writes that doubt can cause unrest and prevent the blessings which come from faith. Then she moves to the topic of the poem "Questions," published in *Exponent,* April 1878, to which she is responding. She admits that women might have reason to complain:

That man has carped, and warped a woman's
spheres
To suit his selfish needs, is too well known

She says that woman's generous nature could be part of the problem. Women "with free and gracious will" give service, until "Man thinks her lack of agency *is* proved." Then Esther compares Christ's gift of the resurrection to she "who brings the clay to life." She suggests that there can be no higher aspiration than being worthy to be lifted to heaven by Christ. Since he has decreed the situations of men and women on earth, each woman should be content. Esther warns against infecting the faith of children with questioning:

O breathe no thought of doubt in thy babe's ears
Nor tell her thy chafed heart's bewildering fears.

Doubt is dangerous for the very young—those just learning the society of heaven on earth. The poem finishes with hope for the future of women's rights:

Though tardy justice may be long delayed
Our cause no longer lingers in the rear
And Woman's onward course can not be stayed
Though man, reluctant, turns her plea to hear
And in that life where we may hope to gain
A respite from worlds of care and pain
Methinks where all is holy, pure and free
"Our Rights" will sink in Perfect Liberty.

She suggests that even though all are important before God, individual agency must be subsumed for the greater cause. Other poems include those written to a wide range of women—friends, family, and other writers, whose poems or essays prompted her response.

OCCASIONAL

In addition to addressing poems to individuals, she writes to the Primary Association, the Mutual Improvement Associations, the youth of Vernon, and other groups of people, often in poems written for a celebration or special meeting. In each case the poem is designed to strengthen communal traditions, reminding the citizens of Vernon that the treasure of community is unity. The kingdom on earth is the kingdom of heaven only as we are unified.

In "Vernon Ward Reunion" (1892), she acknowledges each group of the population —children, young people, the married folks, the widowed, the old folks. The poem ends with the following line, "May old and young just jog along, side by side together" (17), thus supporting her goal of aiding community unity. In "A Little Story, Written for the Primary" (1884), Esther gives the history of the immigrants from England. She writes: "O noble mothers, O brave and honored sires! How your great sacrifice the heart inspires!" (18) "Vernon `Fenced In': Written for MIA of Vernon" (1859) encourages the youth of Vernon to plant trees and build fences to enhance the beauty of the community. In "Written for MIA at Close of Session" (1887) she writes:

We will battle together, determined to win,
With truth and the right, we will conquer. (30)

A final example is "A Plea for Old Folks and Foreigners," written in 1884 for the MIA of Vernon. She hopes to have a specific communal effect—teaching the young people in the community to be more tolerant of the diversity of tongues in town. "Don't mimic us children, our language I know / Is not quite according to rule. . ." (28). The poem teaches that God is Lord of all his children, knows the worth of all his children, and hears them all. Through use of the first person plural, she places herself among those mocked. After all are perfected in Heaven, she writes,

We shall then speak with a beauty and grace all our
own.
Then why should we laugh at each other's mistakes
It falls on the heart like a pall
We are brothers and friends, we seek the same ends
And God is the Lord of us all.

I believe that the language and the aim of Esther Ann's poetry is consistent with the statement I read at the beginning—that it was in the power of the Saints to erect the wall between Mormon and Gentile so high that they should not be able to see over it, ending by making themselves incapable of distinguishing truth from error. Esther Anne Birch Bennion is saying that, when a group shuts itself off from the outside world, the members of that group may begin to define truth, morality, and standards of ethical behavior in a self-referential manner, creating a kind of intellectual solipsism that blinds members to the wider context of truth and error. Her philosophy does not lead to a rigid definition of community or encourage the building of inflexible boundaries.

In her poems, she implies that the way to break down such barriers is to imagine the perspective of the other. On 6 May 1883, she said that "we [do] not often understand the motives of others, therefore we should be charitable in our judgement." She adds that we should "Think kind of each other and seek to [do] good and bless those around us" (Minutes).

In *I and Thou* Martin Buber divides relationship perceptions into two word pairs I-It and I-You. I-It is the I in possession of an object. "I perceive something. I feel something. I imagine something. I want something. I sense something. I think something. . . . All this and its like is the basis of the realm of It" (54). But I-You, he writes, has another basis:

> Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For wherever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; it is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders. Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation. (55)

According to Buber, individuals are affected profoundly by the nature of their connection to others, whether they think of others in a merely self-referential manner, trying to possess others, making them into objects, or whether they stand in respectful relation to others. Following Buber's advice and Esther's, I try to use my fictional imagination as it works over history, to imagine Esther Ann in her various homes and communal relationships.

I imagine two Esthers in one house in Taylorsville, married to the same man. How would each woman think of the other? How would the house, the outbuildings, the pastures, and the herds affect their relationships? Would they each tend toward thinking I-Thou of the husband and I-It for the other wife? Would their sanity require that shift?

I imagine Esther Ann and her sister wife Mary Turpin in the cabin at Mountain Home. How would the prolonged absence of a husband affect that relationship? How would their environment—cedared hills, small stream and tiny fields, the presence of wolves, Goshutes, snakes, and danger from the weather—affect the way they thought about their small community of two women and their two babies?

In Long Valley on the Muddy River Mission, Esther Ann is the only adult in the tent or shack. Her four small children are with her, but her husband is in England on a genealogical mission and the sheepmen from Cedar refuse to retrieve their herds because the animals are so poor. She has an inadequate garden; the ground is so covered with thorns that children cannot go barefoot. How would she think about community there in Nevada, with Gentile miners for neighbors?

I imagine her in Vernon—built on a narrow creek delta, surrounded by desert. The community is defined in part by the expanse of dry wasteland around the valley, made liveable by a creek. She is a widow with seven children, ranging from Israel, a grown man, to Archie Birch in his early teens, surrounded by a diversity and multiplicity of races. In each of these fictional histories, I cannot imagine her separate from place—desert, foothills, valley.

How is a tolerant community created in a location? What are the ethics of community and place? Both the town and the desert determined how Esther Ann considered her life. In "Living in the Open," Gary Snyder praises porousness, being open to the effects from environment:

> Permeability, porousness, works both ways. You are allowed to move through the woods with new eyes and ears when you let go of your little annoyances and anxieties. Maybe this is what the great Buddhist philosophy of interconnectedness means when it talks of "things moving in the midst of each other without bumping" (198)

Esther's poetry is a handbook showing people how to move in the midst of each other without bumping.

In our past, Mormons as a people have had times of mistrust of others: the fear of reprisal by Missourians, mingled with the Mormon desire for revenge, which resulted in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the decades of mistrust of Gentiles, our current mistrust of anything radically liberal or conservative. Recently the leaders of the Church have tried to define us otherwise. President Hinckley said several years ago, "I plead with our people everywhere to live with respect and appreciation for those not of our faith. There is so great a need for civility and mutual respect among those of differing beliefs and philosophies. We must not be partisans of any doctrine of ethnic superiority. We live in a world of diversity. We can and must be respectful toward those with whose teachings we may not agree" (71).

Taking Esther's statement seriously, I suggest that patriotism, racial pride, nationalism, and a desire to purify might transform any community into something twisted with hatred at the core. The answer is in a paradox: the Christian ideal of making strangers into fellow citizens through our charity. Christ makes clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan that our neighbors are not only those like us. One effect of loving someone who is different from us is to dissolve the boundary between self and other, making insider identity problematic.

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"Enlarge This Meditation upon This Great World": Thoughts on an Ecology of Meditation

Brandie R. Siegfried

> Enlarge this meditation upon this great world, so far as to consider the immensity of the creatures this world produces. Our creatures are our thoughts, creatures that are born giants, that reach from east to west, from earth to heaven, that do not only bestride all the sea and land, but span the sun and firmament at once: my thoughts reach all . . .
>
> —John Donne, *Good Friday, 1613*

> Essentially, we belong beautifully to nature. The body knows this belonging and desires it. [Nature] does not exile us either spiritually or emotionally.
>
> —John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*

It has been not quite a decade since Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* introduced an international audience to a rich, bold, exhilarating account of a mind in relation to landscape; in addition to being an environmental essay and a study in the moral fallout of modern technology, the book is a discourse intended to express its author's reflections on a state of soul, as well as to guide others to similar contemplation–an undertaking which places it firmly in the long tradition of meditational literature.

Like John Donne, Williams uses the deliberative meditation to characterize the structure of sacred authority and to subordinate abstract philosophical writing (through recollection) to the concrete lessons of spiritual experience. More particularly, *Refuge* is preoccupied with the context of Mormon heritage, firmly situating meditations on the relationship between personal healing and the reconstruction of an environmental landscape within a framework of Mormon iconography. "Volunteers are beginning to reconstruct the marshes just as I am trying to reconstruct my life," Williams says in the prologue, and within a page we see her driving out to her beloved Great Salt Lake, "past Brigham Young standing on top of 'This Is the Place' monument," and past "the Mormon Tabernacle on Temple Square" (3-5). The monument and the tabernacle provide a symbolic frame for the anatomization of grief, an anatomization that will ultimately lead, through the meditative process, to a moment of enlightenment. Specifically, the allusion to Brigham Young and the figure of the Mormon Tabernacle, when bound to the specific issue of ecological good, call up the historical proposition –advanced by early American settlers such as the Mormons as well as by social philosophers such as Henry David Thoreau–that wilderness, as divine expression, is essentially redemptive.

Williams's exploration of identity firmly links spiritual well being to the perspectives provided by what Thoreau calls a language "of animated life" (107). As Williams writes of solitude:

> It is what sustains me and protects me from my mind. It renders me fully present. I am desert.

> I am mountains. I am Great Salt Lake. There are other languages being spoken by wind, water, and wings. There are other lives to consider: avocets, stilts, and stones. (29)

The invocation of "desert," "mountains," and "stones" recall elements of the American tradition of meditational writing in which the various particulars of nature, experienced in solitude, become an avenue for exploring soul. We see this in Thoreau's essay on solitude: "This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (107). Thoreau and Williams both find a paradox of repose-in-process, where serenity is, "like the lake . . . rippled but not ruffled" (Thoreau, 107). Or, as Williams puts it:

> Peace is the perspective found in patterns. When I see ring-billed gulls picking on the flesh of decaying carp, I am less afraid of death. We are no more and no less than the life that surrounds us. My fears surface in my isolation. My serenity surfaces in my solitude. (29)

This is an expression of solitude that, within the activity of nature, can never be isolation.

Both writers hark back to a religious tradition in which mountains and desert places are holy, where a sense of the sacred may be regained, and where devotional exercises in observation increase a sense of the reverence in which life ought to be held. Such serious sustained reflection in the wilderness is a common trope in the Judeo-Christian canon; and though both Thoreau and Williams glance at institutions of religion with wary eyes, both rely upon a similar religious literary tradition for a broadly authoritative backdrop to their own musings. However, while Thoreau could count on his audience to recognize the tenor of biblical authority running like a thread throughout his ruminations—especially the alliance of prophets with the tabernacles of nature—Williams can rely not only on traditional Christian texts to supplement her contemplations, but on additional Mormon sermons, a supplement that gives *Refuge* a broader range of allusive power with which to ring in the spiritual import of her own words.

Specifically, Williams writes within a religious culture that values as additional scripture the words of 19th and 20th century Mormon leaders, texts that expand upon the biblical trope of the contemplative sojourn in the wilderness and that make the experience of nature central to the individual's increase in love of God and holiness of life. In the Doctrine and Covenants, a book of sacred instructions for Mormons, "glad tidings" are intimately linked to the environment, where the joy of the human in nature is transposed over the features of the landscape:

> Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands. . . . And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing together. . . . And let the eternal creation declare his name forever and ever! (D&C 128:23)

In another example from the same book, a prophetic sermon on the desired attributes of wisdom, truth, and virtue links these characteristics to the beauty of the earth. Indeed, an ability to recognize the nature of the divine in the spectrum of natural phenomena becomes the fulcrum for a shift from a lesser state of awareness to a greater:

> For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy and

> claimeth her own. . . . All things are around him [God]; and he is above all things, and in all things, and is through all things, and is round about all things. (D&C 128: 41)

The divine attributes cataloged in this segment signal the transition from sermon to song, from the traits that make one holy to the holiness found in nature:

> The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God. (D&C 128:45)

These texts demonstrate many of the elements of traditional protestant meditational practice. Such work encourages the reader to see the self as the embodiment of the object of meditation (Radcliffe, 17). Thus, the desire for holiness and the contemplation of holy places often lead to a synthesis of the experience of nature and the logic of spiritual renewal; the self is seen as being *throughout* nature. For Williams, as for John O'Donohue, "Love does not remain within the heart, it flows out to build secret tabernacles in the landscape" (19).

In addition to sacred texts from within Mormon culture, Williams's work alludes to the equally expansive fabric of the sermons of Brigham Young, a leader whose words are the stuff of everyday life for many in the writer's home state of Utah.[1] For Brigham Young, moral and physical cleanliness and environmental care were no more to be separated than mind and body. On several occasions he urged settlers, "Keep your valley pure, keep your towns as pure as you possibly can, keep your hearts pure." In fact, the human family is to be construed as an extension of environmental relationships:

> The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy, wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the human family. (Qtd. in Norton and Ricks 24)

Indeed, Young pushes toward a pragmatics of environmental relations that has both temporal and spiritual consequences. "What," he asks, "constitutes health, wealth, joy, and peace? In the first place, *good pure air* is the greatest sustainer of animal life" (24; emphasis mine). In the same vein as the Old Testament prophets, Young aligns the state of nature with the state of individual souls; outward pollution thus reflects unfavorably on the spiritual condition of the community.

Nor did Young's attention to the environment disappear from the religion's discourse of prophecy. In 1976, then-President of the Church Spencer W. Kimball admonished the religious community in similarly striking terms:

> But when I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened. Iniquity seems to abound. The Destroyer seems to be taking full advantage. . . . I have the feeling that the good earth can hardly bear our presence upon it. . . . [The church leaders] constantly cry out against that which is intolerable in the sight of the Lord: against pollution of mind, body, and our surroundings. (Qtd. in Norton and Ricks 56)

Indeed, though borrowing from other religious traditions in the development of her contemplative musings, Williams's work rings with the same force of urgency evinced by both Young and Kimball, an urgency that posits the potential of the soul as being irrevocably bound up with all of creation.

With prophet and tabernacle bracketing

and sustaining her reflections, Williams has the makings of a spiritual drama. One of the principal actions of most meditational work is, after all, to project oneself onto a mental stage, to participate in an interior drama of the mind. This occurs when the mind deliberately invokes a memory–in this case the catalog of nature–and brings it into full consciousness. The anticipated result of this interior drama is the creation of a "self" that is at one with itself, with others, with nature, and with the supernatural (Martz, 10-25). As Williams puts it, "I feel like a potter trying to shape my life with the materials at hand. But my creation is internal. My vessel is my body, where I hold a space for healing for those I love" (168). Thus, the process of dramatic creation is also, simultaneously, the enactment of ample, actual healing.

Ultimately, *Refuge* joins a growing body of work that combines political urgency with spiritual transformation. In fact, it is difficult not to hear the echoes of Alice Walker's essay, "Everything Is a Human Being," in Williams's employment of the term "mental creation." In the decade before Williams would publish her work, Walker forcefully asserted the familial relationship of all things, including humans, in the vast web of the environment:

> While the Earth is enslaved, none of us is free. . . . Our thoughts must be on how to restore the Earth its dignity as a living being; how to stop raping and plundering it as a matter of course. We must begin to develop the consciousness that everything has equal rights because existence itself is equal. In other words, we are all here: trees, people, snakes, alike. We must realize that even tiny insects in the South American jungle know how to make plastic, for instance; *they have simply chosen not to cover the Earth with it.* (148; emphasis mine)

Walker insists:

> Beyond feeding and clothing and sheltering ourselves, even abundantly, we should be allowed to destroy only what we ourselves can re-create. We cannot re-create this world. We cannot re-create "wilderness." We cannot even, truly, re-create ourselves. Only our behavior can we re-create, or create anew. (151)

For Walker, as for Williams, deliberative contemplation of the environment both demonstrates the structure of sacred authority and subordinates the abstractions of political ideology to the concrete lessons of "trees, people, snakes alike." Indeed, for both writers, the characteristic most associated with deity–the act of creation and the making and preservation of life–mirrors the human capacity to create behavior anew. Meditative discourse thus becomes a medium for re-creating selves, changing behavior, thereby re-creating the world.

In *Refuge,* the successful synthesis of the recollections of loved ones and sustained meditation in the "language of animated life" triumphantly transforms what otherwise would be experienced as unutterable loss. Indeed, the ecology of meditation allows Williams to find her mother in all things:

> I feel calm, having just returned from a brisk walk along the base of the foothills. The balm of the fresh air; Great Salt Lake glistened on the horizon. The valley is in sharp focus, crystal clear. I am reminded that what I adore, admire, and draw from Mother is inherent in the Earth. My mother's spirit can be recalled simply by placing my hands on the black humus of mountains or the lean sands of desert. Her love, her warmth, and her breath, even her arms around me–are the waves, the wind, sunlight, and water. (214)

Ultimately, writers such as Donne, Thoreau, Walker, and Williams demonstrate that in the revelation of nature–in the contemplation of holy things within the tabernacles of the landscape–the human family finds that the seasons revolve into the eternal and that all which is truly loved lives on.

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NOTE

[1] Currently, for instance, Mormons spend an hour each Sunday studying the writings of Brigham Young as part of the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society curricula.

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Reflections and Deflections: Austin and Alta Fife and Mormon Ethnography

David A. Allred

Since this paper grew out of a folklore project, I'll start with a story. Controversy over Mormon ethnography erupted in my folklore graduate seminar last semester. We had read Austin and Alta Fife's essay "A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave" and had came to class ready for a literary lynching. The 1956 essay is a prologue to the Fifes's influential book of Mormon folklore, *Saints of Sage and Saddle,* and narrates, with a decidedly cynical tone, the typical life experiences of a Mormon. For example, they suggest that a missionary gains a testimony through "the habit of expressing his conformity to the social and intellectual pattern set for him by the leadership of the church" (10). In the class that night, our comments all criticized the Fife's one-sided treatment as completely misrepresenting Mormon culture.

After a few minutes of such discussion, one class member countered that, while she didn't agree with the Fifes' argument, she had to admit that they were not completely wrong in the way they portrayed Mormonism. This woman pointed out that the Fifes show the representative Mormon girl as unconcerned with theology because she will have a returned missionary husband (13) and then told of women she has known with similar ideas (even in 1998). Seeing that the Fifes' point of view had some validity changed our initial outrage to a more tolerant, more thoughtful, and perhaps more honest critique of Mormon culture.

Inherent human bias is one of the factors that led both to the article's tone and our initial rejection of the article. The problem posed by this inherent subjectivity is an issue that ethnography has been working to address in recent years. Traditionally, ethnography has been researcher-based, the ethnographer having complete control over the interpretation process and therefore being the one who decides how a culture is represented. Under this model, the ethnographer has the power to represent reality for a group.[1] The Fifes' conclusions are like this; their biased perspective is presented as fact.

Alternatively, reflexive ethnography is an effort to reduce hidden researcher bias and to develop a more democratic rhetoric of ethnography. In reflexive ethnography, the interpreter of the data seeks to break down the researcher-informant power struggle and to acknowledge his or her own voice in the interpretations. The definitive voice is no longer of the researcher; instead the researcher allows other voices to be heard. Of course, bias will always exist, but reflexivity seeks to minimize it by valuing more than one perspective (Wilson). In this rhetoric, the culture also has a say in how it should be described.[2] In a reflexive ethnography, the views of people who see Mormon differently from the Fifes would also have a voice.

Reflexive methodology in ethnography can help when conflicts arise because it allows more voices to be heard than traditional ethnography.

For example, ethnographer Elaine Lawless advocates a form of reflexivity, which includes taking her interpretations of a culture to the culture to hear how its members interpret her views (306). A discourse is created, and this "polyphony" of voices can in almost all cases shed at least some light on a culture. Each voice will have a certain perspective on the culture; when examined with other voices, it can create, if not a complete picture of the culture, then at least real conversation. By adding both the Fifes' ethnography (and responses to it) to the dialogue on Mormon culture, we can open a more constructive dialogue.

Part of understanding the Fifes's contribution to the dialogue is examining the writers' perspective. Knowing some of their humanistic worldview aids in understanding what they are saying and why, because their beliefs in humanism account for some of their less orthodox perspectives of Mormon culture. (Humanism can be a vague term, but I use it here to refer to the modernist faith in human knowledge, including science, and a waning belief in the supernatural). William A. (Bert) Wilson recounts an interview with the Fifes in which Austin explained that, while he and his wife "still cherished their Mormon heritage, they had turned increasingly toward humanism for their spiritual sustenance" (Wilson, 14). The Fifes themselves admitted this bias in their introduction to *Saints of Sage and Saddle*: "Our roots are in the soil of [Mormon] culture, however much they may have been nourished by the mulch of humanistic tradition. *This work is an effort to cultivate the plant, not to uproot it*" (xii; emphasis mine). The final statement suggests that the Fifes' opinions of Mormonism, if viewed as offensive, should not be taken as malicious.

It might also help to contextualize the Fifes as part of the Lost Generation movement, which produced such academics as Juanita Brooks, Fawn Brodie, Maurine Whipple, and folklorists Wayland Hand and Hector Lee. The academics and artists of this movement dealt with issues of Mormon culture and doctrine in ways that gained increasing national attention but alienated readers at home (England, xxii-xxiii). The Fifes were not acting as renegades from the faith, per se, but were working in a time period when religious faith was not as compatible with conceptions of academic rigor.

By understanding the Fifes' academic orientation, we can listen to what they have to say and decide if it has merit. Kenneth Burke's theory of terministic screens explains why listening to other perspectives is important. No one perspective can contain all truth. In using language, a symbol system, one attempts to describe reality using empty signs. Since reality is so vast, we can describe only portions of it. When a scholar directs attention to an aspect of reality, he or she inevitably ignores another. Burke writes: "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (Burke 45; italics his). Both an orthodox Mormon view of culture and the Fifes' view are necessarily biased, focused on only some of the information. It follows that adding and juxtaposing multiple perspectives will yield additional insight.

Two areas in which the Fifes critique Mormon culture are missionary work and prayer. They use a mock-heroic tone to describe the mission experience and life journey of a Mormon, a traditional technique of satire. For example, they present an elder, leaving for the mission field, as a "warrior [departing] for a field of battle . . . to fight God's battles among the Gentiles" (8). Further, returned missionaries have been "valiant in the fight against sin" and are "champion[s] of the true and everlasting battle in its endless struggle against the oppressor" (10).

By praising the hero in his epic struggle, the Fifes portray missions as anything but selfless; those who see Mormonism differently may react with the same hostility as our folklore class. But Mormon culture shows that the Fifes are partly right. Deseret Book carries a line of religious T-shirts that are supposed to be didactic and stylish at the same time. One such T-shirt has the words "Stripling Warriors" running across the top of a drawing of young men with cartoon-proportioned muscles, reminiscent of Arnold Freiberg's popular Book of Mormon illustrations. The men are leaning together in solidarity and have their arms crossed in a defensive yet menacing manner. Under the drawing are the words, "Mommas' Boys." These T-shirts are popular among young male missionaries as they leave their mothers for their mission "battlefield." By wearing the shirt, a missionary can identify with the genuinely heroic Book of Mormon story of Helaman's stripling warriors. The Fifes' mock heroic is not completely their invention.

However, even in reflecting one aspect of Mormon culture in their ethnography, the Fifes deflect some of the realities of serving a mission. Returned missionaries also talk of the Christian service they gave and the love they developed for the people whom they served. Indeed, in Mormon idiom, you "serve" a mission. One returned missionary expressed the love gained on his mission in a history he wrote to be passed on to his family as a significant memorate. My father, Alan Allred, quotes from a 1970 journal entry he made as a missionary in Northern Ireland after seeing a family he had taught join the church: "I just can't believe the change that has taken place in the Connollys. It really humbles me when I realize how much the Lord has done for them. . . . I just can't believe how much I've grown to love them in the past months" (Allred, 3). Allred still corresponds with the Connolly family 28 years later. The love that missionaries develop is concealed in the Fife account because of their emphasis on other aspects. The Fifes satirize the mission experience to present one version of Mormon life, not always the one most Mormons would agree with. They reveal some things while concealing others.

The Fifes also characterize prayer in a way that can be controversial in its selection of reality, while being an instructive commentary on Mormon culture. They characterize prayers as "incantations," "poems," and "formulas" (2). These terms connote formatted and aesthetic pleas, yet fail to communicate the heartfelt emotion of pleading with Deity. "Incantations" conjure images of pagan ritual, while "formulas" and "poems" have functional and aesthetic uses respectively, but neither suggests what many Mormons would consider a major reason for prayer: to commune with and petition a Heavenly Father.

One of the most famous narratives of Mormonism deals with prayer in a way that the Fife's description dismisses. The story of Joseph Smith's First Vision is told probably more than any story in the culture. In it a young boy prays, but not with a set prayer or with a mindless "incantation." Instead he asks God a specific question and in response receives a heavenly vision. This narrative, which is so oft-repeated and referred to as an example, shows a side of Mormon prayer practice hidden by the ethnography of the Fifes.

Still, although Mormons have only a handful of official set prayers, at times prayers in familiar situations can grow mundane and repetitive. Many jokingly include the blessings on meals among the set prayers in the Church. In my own mission, I heard missionaries kneel to pray and jokingly say "number 46" and then pretend to get up, again playing off the commonness of prayer in some situations. The Fifes' ethnography is not totally off the mark; not every Mormon prayer is heartfelt. But the soul-hungry example of Enos in the Book of Mormon is also a model of Mormon prayer practice. The dialogue on prayer is instructive on the range of the Mormon experience, from Enos's ideal to the sometimes practical reality of a "number 46" prayer. In any case, the dialogue expands the view of the culture.

Advocating an open dialogue on the ethnography of Mormon culture requires a discussion on censorship. Are all views of Mormon culture equally valid? Taken to its extreme, this argument could force us into valuing slanderous, inflammatory, or irresponsible ethnography. Of course, there are limits on who can be meaningful and beneficial participants in the ethnographic dialogue. Yet instead of setting limits to who should participate, perhaps I can suggest a guiding principle. Since Mormon ethnography is about describing a community, the participants of the debate should be community-builders. This requirement does not necessarily require orthodox views, but it does require honest views, willingness to listen as well as to speak, and responsible and credible perspectives.

There is a tension between the Fifes' humanistic treatment of Mormon culture and the culture's sometimes rosy picture of itself. Understanding Burke's concept of how limited language is and using reflexive ethnographic principles mandates a dialogue on culture. Discussing where the two (and other) views diverge can illuminate points at which the values of Mormons are not always expressed in their actions. The dialogue can present more perspectives of an inherently biased discussion. The Fifes may point out less-than-saintly motives among the Latter-day Saints, and the more orthodox culture can respond with explanations of other reasons its members do certain things. Each side of the argument can look at what the other reflects and deflects.

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NOTES

1. A similar controversy can be seen among the Pueblo Indians. Paula Gunn Allen reports that anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons offended the Pueblo Indians whom she had been studying by her attitude toward their religion: "In accordance with her academic training, she objectified, explained, detailed, and analyzed their lives as though they were simply . . . artifacts" (383). The tribe attributed an ensuing drought to the Parsons incident; hurt and angered, they cut off outsider access to sacred events (383-84).

2. This theoretical shift has been promoted by members of several faiths and has been applied to religions other than Mormonism. See Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (New York: Penguin, 1995), especially his discussion of snake-handling narratives, pp. 183-89; and Paul Alan Cox, *Nafanua: Saving the Samoan Rain Forest* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1997).

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When Athens and Jerusalem Meet: How a Mormon Should Read "Whole Other Bodies"

Karalyn Durland

As Mormons, we are called to be stewards. From the first time we hear Orson F. Whitney's challenge to produce "Shakespeares of our own," we are urged to form a literary home in which Mormon literature can reside and be fostered. At times, the infants we house turn on us as they mature; as recalcitrant teenagers, they attack our beliefs, our passions, and our spirits. We must decide if they belong with us, or if we have adopted them too hastily. At other times, we are rewarded by the truths and insights they unveil. In either instance, as literary parents, we must first decide to call a work our own and, second, we must shoulder our responsibility to make it better, which always involves improving ourselves. To do so, we necessarily rely, as do all well-intending Mormon parents, on the principles of the gospel. It is only on this solid foundation that a literary family can survive.

Like all parents, Mormon literature critics struggle to discern the true behaviors of texts. This, the most difficult step of the critical process, determines how the text should be received. Does it deserve discipline? Reward? Should it be praised or cast out? Walter Kirn's "Whole Other Bodies" tests the Mormon literary response and challenges it to improve. It asks us if this story is a child of ours or a wayward fugitive threatening assault. It measures the progress of the Mormon's literary household by knocking on its door and waiting to see if it will be answered by a Christian.

Bruce Jorgensen, in his farewell address as president of the Association for Mormon Letters, urges Mormon critics to "let the stranger say," comparing a text with a stranger and the audience with a host. The metaphor suggests that critics should be hospitable: "[W]elcome the stranger, bathe and clothe and feed, maybe even hear the story, then ask who. By then the stranger is among us" (30). Jorgensen encourages us to allow the stranger to feel at home before we assess him; we must give him a chance and evaluate him as we would ourselves, or as one of our own. I would argue that if the stranger approaches my city wielding guns and grenades, I will not regard him as a guest but a threat. But then, do I turn away the youth with the Swiss army knife or the man with the cane? Where is the line to be drawn between potential enemy and possible angel? How much should we trust these strangers?

In an elusive way, "Whole Other Bodies" dares critics to address these questions. The story can be read from the point of view of a trusting subject or from that of a threatened victim. At first glance, the story seems innocuous, at home with us. It witnesses the happy conversion of a strained family to a new church. Missionaries bring a "new soft way of doing things, with less bumping into each other, less noise" (Kirn, 329) and the family grows. Still, is this a Mormon story? Upon closer review we discover that there is no mention of the Book of Mormon, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Joseph Smith in the story. In fact, there is no direct reference to any gospel principles at all. Perhaps it is not a Mormon story. Perhaps it deceives the Mormon reader.

This leads to the question, "How should the story be read?" Gideon Burton, in his landmark essay "Should We Ask, 'Is This Mormon Literature?'—Towards a Mormon Criticism," counsels, "Unless we safeguard our sense of being a peculiar people with noble and lofty purposes, Mormon letters can never achieve its potential significance for Mormon and non-Mormon audiences alike" (10). Mormons must retain their exclusive identity as they read and critique texts. This attitude of preservation is essential to their survival as a genre and a society. However, diligence does not necessarily require suspicion. Reading "Whole Other Bodies" from a defensive position, we find the family in the story discussing "Our Lord and his plan for the *American* family." We notice that the missionaries have "short blond hair and Western voices" and see the parents "smil[ing] and nodd[ing] with wide, shining looks in their eyes" (328, emphasis mine). We may conclude that Kirn is poking fun at the Mormons with their white, American religion. The wide-eyed parents may be happy converts who fall, politely, into the Mormon trap, completely taken in by the blond disciples who show them that "the decay of the nuclear family unit . . . was happening everywhere, all over the country and all over the world, not just in our house" (329), telling them they belong, offering them a new family and a new way of life. It begins to seem that the family is not learning Mormonism, but culture. As we reread the beginning of the story, the narrator's comment that the Lord, "saved our souls forever" (327) begins to look overemphasized. The story is too simple. The characters change too easily. The missionaries discuss with the boys the possibility of falling asleep and in a dream meeting "a stranger, teaching truths that the person would wake up knowing. And we agreed that this was possible and might even happen someday to one of us" (330). The reference proposes the possibility that the missionaries are strangers, coming to the family as if in a dream and indoctrinating each of them in their hibernating, vulnerable states. And then, the ending: [M]y tall father, clean and pale as he held his breath and let himself fall backwards. . . . [T]hat was the moment when God *took him in entirely*. It happened to all of us that day" (331, emphasis mine). Have we, the Mormon critics, been "taken in" as this family has?

Despite the evidence, "Whole Other Bodies" does not take its readers for a ride. Instead, it tests the literary house; it looks for a meal of good faith and a bed of charity. This stranger says, "Here is my story. Take it as it is." Mary Lythgoe Bradford, in her essay on personal essays, asserts that "Mormons, usually a jolly people, often seem afraid of humor in print" (10). Unfortunately, humor is not the only thing we fear.

As proved in class discussion, Mormons, upon meeting "shaky" text, or passages addressing issues that conservative Latter-day Saints do not consider wholesome, tend to question the status of the author's temple recommend. We confuse the author and his work. Mormon literature, more than most other genres, is susceptible to a sensitive, defensive readership. The story, with its absence of doctrine and still seemingly Mormon nature, reminds us that Walter Kirn is kin, a Mormon himself, and who could deliver a more personal blow than one of our own?

Eugene England's essay, "The Possibility of Dialogue," admonishes readers to embody the same gospel standards we establish in our lives as we read and critique texts. He reminds us that "a dialogue can realize its full possibilities only if there is charity" (11). When Kirn's story is read with charity, the reading is improved; and we, in turn, improve as critics as we espouse our Christian doctrine. The reasons to second-guess Kirn's motives are understandable, but the story does not attack. Instead it merely, ingeniously, allows us to become defensive instead of reading with charity and with trust that the story will not deprecate our faith.

The first point of the story's defense lies in the form of the story itself. It is written as a reflection and reads as a somewhat distant memory; the first-person narrator recalls his childhood, referring to obscure details such as a refrigerator full of cheese, his mother leaving the windows open, late night talk shows, and strawberry Kool-Aid. The tone of the novel is simplistic, childlike. The narrator conveys unimportant specifics and forgoes the mention of doctrine because that is not what a child remembers. Instead, he identifies emotions: "Satan was with us then, I think, his spirit of confusion. Inside the house you could feel it" (327). [S]omething was holding [my father] back, making him lazy" (328). "I started to love the missionaries and so did my mother" (330). The narrator's feelings substitute for the doctrine we crave, and he appears more naive, more innocent because of his deficiency of scripture.

Another defense can be explained with the help of Richard Cracroft. In his essay "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature," Cracroft discusses the differences between the mantic and the sophic, as defined by Hugh Nibley: "two fundamentally antithetical ways of perceiving the world" (qtd. in Cracroft 19). The sophic world view is described as, "critical, objective, naturalistic, scientific, and horizontal in attitude" whereas the mantic view is "inspired, prophetic, or oracular" (19). If "Whole Other Bodies" were read from the sophic world view, the reader may perceive it as a ridicule of the Church, a satirical archetype of the proverbial "golden contact" and his conversion, for all of the analytical, logical reasons aforementioned.

However, the story reveals that this is not its purpose. In the final scene of the story, baptism guests deliver sermons about "that perfect love which hovers around us always, in the sky, and of how some people ignored this love by always looking straight ahead with pinched, busy faces. But my family hadn't done that, we'd looked up." The narrator tells the reader that he "looked up;" he chose the mantic view. Instead of focusing on "everything modern . . . a phone in every important room, a new French blender, tilt-back armchairs," the family saw something more in life: "None of that was helping, nothing we owned or had. . . . Then the missionaries came" (328).

The story challenges the Mormon reader to do the same: to see more than the sophic world, to read the story with charity and faith, and to treat it as you would a dear friend. Be comfortable with the stranger, give him the benefit of the doubt as you would want someone to do for you. Hear the story as a Christian instead of as a gladiator looking for a confrontation.

"Whole Other Bodies" asks the Mormon critic to exercise his or her religion in one more arena of his or her life. The story offers not much more than a feel-good testimony of how the gospel can improve lives. It is so simple and candid that we are tempted to wonder if the published-and-therefore-talented author is conveying a deeper meaning. However, Mormon critics must necessarily allow texts to *be* their children before they can treat texts as children. "Whole Other Bodies" must be allowed into our literary house, trusted, and then nurtured as an independent entity, separate from Walter Kirn.

Burton explains, "Our early leaders did not divorce the concept of literature from that of achieving Zion, and this meant not short-changing literature's potential to help saints both teach *and* learn" (19). As the Mormon critic learns to master this form of literary critique, he or she embraces gospel principles, becoming both mother and father, Christian and scholar, and, in the harmonic marriage of the two, may one day, rear an angel, a Shakespeare of his own.

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A Most Remarkable Work: R. Paul Cracroft's *A Certain Testimony: A Mormon Epic*

Richard Y. Thurman

A cartoon in a magazine some years ago pictures Leonardo da Vinci—always a bit ahead of his time—showing off the television set he had just made. "It's beautiful, Leonardo," his friend says. "A real breakthrough. . . . But *where*, may I ask, are you going to plug it in?"

Leonardo's error of a few hundred years is roughly parallelled by Cracroft's in thinking he could take 479 pages of iambic pentameter verse and somehow plug into the modern-day--or should I say the Latter-day?—mind.

How could he have made such an error in judgment? The explanation I favor is that he was *drunk*--intoxicated in the way that one might well be after spending five years in the close company of William Shakespeare and John Milton. Not that Cracroft read either to any extent during the years he worked on his poem: *A Certain Testimony: A Mormon Epic* (Salt Lake City: Epic West, 1979). But he *was* working daily with iambic pentameter blank verse, and his perception of *everything* was undoubtedly affected by his immersion in the poetic medium in which Shakespeare and Milton had penned their greatest works.

With such illustrious figures beside him as he wrote, it was easy to imagine that a good many of his contemporaries would someday read his poem and share his own enthusiasm for the poetic form he had mastered.

But time, I think, has proved him wrong. More's the pity, for this *is* a remarkable work, quite possibly the most powerful picture yet of the epic sweep of the Mormon story.

The poem came to my attention shortly after its publication in 1979. Although I had discontinued my participation in the Church some years before, I had been raised on tales of heroic struggles in which my own forebears were major participants. Thus I knew in my very bones the epic nature of the Mormon story and was intrigued by the poem's subtitle, *A Mormon Epic*. I seriously doubted, however, that a modern-day writer could write a true epic and began my reading with the intention of going just far enough to confirm my doubts.

To my great surprise, I found the work hard to put down. This Cracroft was something else! Using a form of verse favored by many of the greatest writers in the English language since the sixteenth century—and using it with a skill that put him honorably within their company—he soon convinced me that he had the voice to tell an epic story.

I did not, however, finish the poem at the time. Since a large portion was taken up with events and characters in the Book of Mormon—a book I had put behind me some years before—it was not really my story he was telling.

In addition, however, I confess to a basic fear of a great deal of poetry. All too often, I've found that poets, in their laudable efforts to extract everything possible from language, go beyond any language that is comprehensible to me. I feel more at home with prose—both the easy prose of *Sports Illustrated,* or, in more venturesome moments, the weightier prose of something like *The Economist* or *Foreign Affairs.*

Given my uneasiness with poetry, it will be understood that I was content to let the Mormon community discover for itself the remarkable new work in its midst, thus leaving me free to go on with my own prosaic life.

But some months ago, curious to learn what had happened since the poem's publication, I looked into the available reviews. I found just three—all of them appearing in the year following publication. Two offered just a bare notice that the poem had been published. The third, while more extensive, was mainly an exercise in damning with faint praise.

The reviews jarred something deep in me—that sense of disproportion we feel when justice has gone unserved. My earlier dip into the work had convinced me that something major had happened in the Mormon literary community. But now I learned that almost no serious attention had been paid that notable event. What was needed, it seemed to me—if one were to begin to understand and possibly convey to others just why this work might well be the milestone in Mormon literature I suspected it to be—was the simple determination to crack it wide open and start down that long 479-page road with something like the stout heart of a Mormon pioneer.

This I did during the next months, setting aside an hour or so each day for my journey. Unlike the pioneers, however, who never found their trek becoming easier, I found myself delighting more and more in the trip as I got into the iambic swing of things, learning to leap from line to line—to line to line to line— with something of the agility of a mountain goat traversing a cliff face. Indeed, I could not in good conscience recommend iambic pentameter to anyone who hadn't a real appreciation for the marvelous things a mountain goat can do.

But enough of my talking about it. Let me now move toward demonstrating its narrative power by reading two selections from the poem.

In this printed version of my talk, I cannot of course demonstrate with spoken examples how the poem should be read to bring out both its rhythm and continuity of thought. But if the poem is to be rescued from the oblivion of seeming too difficult, it is essential for potential readers to learn about the practice of enjambment as it relates to the reading of iambic pentameter. The term *enjambment* derives from the French verb *enjamber,* to "stride." In English prosody, carrying over the notion of vigorous movement implied by "striding," it refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line.

In much of today's poetry, with its relaxation of traditional rules, such as leaving line lengths up to the whim or talent of the poet, enjambments are generally somewhat relaxed, the end of a line coming at a point where a certain sense, if not the full sense, of the sentence has been conveyed. In contrast, enjambments in iambic pentameter, where line lengths are rigidly defined, frequently come at a point where no sense has yet been conveyed. If finding the sense of each full sentence along the way is the desired goal in reading, the arbitrary, nosense enjambments in iambic pentameter lead to an urgency in the reader to move on to the end of a sentence, conceivably several lines away.

It is this urgency to move on toward graspable sense, a place where the mind can pause on its way for a moment of reflection, that I have compared with the actions of a mountain goat traversing a cliff face. Where the goat moves from interim point to interim point on its way to more solid footing, the reader's eyes and mind move across and down the iambic pentameter lines in search of our human kind of solidity in meaning. Or so they do if they have been trained

But of what does such training consist?

Two simple rules: (1) Unless there is one of the common indicators for pausing or stopping at the end of a line—a dash, comma, colon, semicolon, or period—the reader should not hesitate for one millisecond before jumping to the next line; and (2) If the capital letter at the beginning of each line is not preceded by a period at the end of the previous line, pretend that it isn't a capital—and pretend for all you're worth, for these seemingly innocent capitals can fatally interrupt the reader's progress toward the sentence's end and sense.

While it may seem simple to the point of simple-mindedness to mention things so obvious, it is a fact that readers who come to iambic pentameter untrained will be crippled by the habits of a lifetime. First, it is a perfectly natural reflex to pause, however briefly, with both eyes and mind at the end of a line. Second, our acceptance of the tradition that a capital letter always signals the beginning of something new became a reflex in most of us as early as the first grade. Both reflexes must be quashed, however, if the reader is to get past the enjambment points of iambic pentameter and into the rhythmic line-to-line flow and sense of the poem.

But isn't all of this unnecessarily complicated? Why not something simpler? Why have so many writers in English from the sixteenth century on chosen to write in a form that compels the reader to remain every second on the qui vive? The answer is implicit in the question, for there can be an extraordinary aliveness and excitement in this medium if the reader remains alert to the rules.

A Certain Testimony deals with an enormous range of observations, events and characters—all the way from the preexistent world to various books in the Book of Mormon, beginnings of the Church in New York, persecutions of the early days, the trek to Salt Lake, troubles with the U.S. government, and, finally, the extension of the Church's mission to every part of the world.

Along the way it treats in rich detail the traditional themes of love and hate, war and peace, good and evil; above all, it deals with those who love their God with all their hearts and minds and souls and with those who just as passionately hate the very idea of Him.

With such a range of topics, why have I chosen Lucifer and Emma, of all people, to read from? I give credit for my choice to the Association for Mormon Letters. Had I been granted an hour, or preferably two for my talk, I could have brought to your attention many memorable descriptions of Nature, many arresting insights into the human condition, and a great wealth of dialogue from characters in the preexistent world, the 19th and 20th century worlds, and from the books of Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, and Helaman. Just as Thomas Mann fleshed out a biblical short story into the 750,000 words of his 'Joseph' books, Cracroft, with a scholar's zeal, a poet's imagination, and five years of dedicated labor, has brought a multitude of individuals, groups, and things in the Mormon story vividly to life.

All well and good, but since I have a thin sound-bite of time to introduce you to the broad reaches of an epic, I must follow sound-bite rules and grab attention in whatever way I can. Since both Lucifer and Emma have personal qualities and compelling agendas that make them natural attention-grabbers, I shall leave it to their words in the poem to demonstrate its narrative power.

Lucifer, disturbed by Joseph's work in restoring the Gospel, muses as to the best way to bring him down.

"This man of humble name and origin
Disturbs me more than most. His doctrines reek
Of all the simple majesty and strength
That I found imperturbable when once
I wasted forty days astride the cold,

Unyielding granite of the wilderness,
Confronted by the even harder will
Of Him I needed most of all to make
My pre-existent flight achieve success.
I know his streak of vanity is wide.
On this I'll prey. But wider still his need
To stand at once apart from other men,
Yet be accepted and in turn embraced.
Embraced? I've stumbled on the very word
On which to base my strategy and fold
Within my arms this lackey of the Lord.
The Earth is full of men who live by truth —
Or say they do to put aside a lie
Long buried save to them alone. I know
That countless other men would rather die
Than touch accumulated coins not theirs,
But fruit of others' hands and sweat. And yet
These paragons of honesty dismiss,
Upon the sight of creamy breast, all thought
Of purity. Those hands which push away
The tainted gold can grope in anxious heat
Inside the folds of robe and flesh without
Regard for ownership or thought of fate.
It matters not to me the fashions donned
Or doffed by women, for they change as winds
Might change; the mystery is not in cut
Of cloth but in the apple-baited trap
I set in Eden, reproduction just
A part of her sublime complexity.
What God may call a drive divinely placed,
I twist or let a man, entranced, subvert.
The magic magnet palsies out the hand
Of men beribboned in the battle's heat,
Or may, instead, convert a virginal,
Compliant woman to a lynx; her nails
Will rake her lover's sweat-wet back in strange
Ferocity, which might not come again
On call, though each would recreate its cause.
God knows that pride and wealth, ambition's
pull
And hero's perch are more than adequate
Devices in my hand to win most men
To my emoluments. If ever these
Should fail, I've merely had to heat some blood
To bring recalcitrants to bed—and heel.
Most tenuous of all my recompense
To man, illicit love still holds its place
As most enticing goal of goals, perhaps
Because each writhing couple hopes to find,
Or found, an Eden better than the first.
On this hot forge I'll hammer Joseph's heart."
(429-30)

Emma responds to Hyrum's presenting her with a document explaining "The Principle."

"Convinced sometimes against their will, the
men
Who led the Church lost little time in talk,
Spent more in sealing rites and shielding wife
From wife until the Principle caught hold.
Confession milked a tear or tooth-marked lip
And more than once a curse or broken home;
But some equated sharing man and bed
With sainthood. If the Lord endorsed the
scheme,
The devil take the man who hung his pants
On just one hook. When Rumor doffed her
shoes
And kicked against full many a bedroom door,
The Prophet printed out the word of God,
Dispatching Hyrum with the document
To mollify an Emma long suspicious.
"He says that I accept or stand condemned?
Dogmatic every inch of him. He talks
About espousing virgins just as if
He'd traded off for corn six pounds of beans.
Who else in all the Church can match his gift
Of sweet persuasion? Oh, how I know! If God
Refused to turn him into Abraham
And me to Sarah, Joseph must have sulked
Until the skies turned black. The *last* to know!
How this infuriates me, shames my soul
In front of every man—and clouds each wife.
Can you imagine? . . . No, you're just like *him*!
How sick I get of scanning every slut

Who bulges out her stays to taunt my man.
My women friends no longer represent
What friends should be. I see in each what he
Might see and ask myself if she's embraced
Him. . . . Read these pagan words, you ask. What
for?
They're burned across these drooping breasts.
I've heard
The dirty whispers for so long that I
Could quote you verse and line. Epistle One
Of Joseph to Incontinentia:
'Should one inconsequential woman, worn
Beyond her years, grow unattractive—seek
Another wife and lay up treasures both
On Earth and in the Heavens high,' saith God.
Don't stammer out excuses. That's the gist
Of all those well-couched phrases. That's my
thanks.
(She holds the document above a candle flame.)
The flame licks up and turns this page to black
And powdered ash. Go back and let him know
That—fragile as this crinkled char may be —
It will outlast my love should he persist
In mocking marriage thus and spiting me."
(434-35)

These two snippets, if read in accordance with the rules set out above, may at least suggest that a distinguished poem can also be, in today's vernacular, a "good read."

A consideration of how closely the work reflects the current nuances of Mormon thought lies outside my immediate concern and certainly beyond my expertise. I have been concerned mainly with the narrative effectiveness of this poetic treatment of the Mormon story, but concerned too with the thought that others might possibly join me in discovering a much-neglected work.

Behind the mild optimism of that thought, however, there looms a large question: Just who do I think I'm kidding?

For even though *A Certain Testimony* is mercifully free from the obscurities in so much of today's poetry, like any poem worthy of the name, it demands a full measure of dedicated and concentrated thought. Unfortunately, that particular virtue is not one of the hallmarks of our age of multiple distractions and demands upon every minute of our time. I would expect that few if any, then, will find the time or the inclination to crack the book wide open and start down that long 479-page road. Again, more's the pity!

For this *is* a most remarkable work—indeed a great work in so many ways. For myself, taking all things into consideration—all of its challenges, and all of the rewards it offers the attentive reader—I can think of nothing in the literature that captures so well the epic sweep of the Mormon story.

ADDITIONAL EXCERPTS

Michael and Jehovah visit the forming Earth

But on that day Jehovah said,
"On thee, sweet planet swirling toward thy fate,
Bestow I now the name of Earth to wear
Betimes in pride, yet oft to bow in shame
Before thy sister spheres, who, like thyself,
Have felt the tread of devils and of Gods."
And as He spake, He thrust his fingers deep
Into the soil, inserting pregnant seeds
Of grass and trees to spread a carpet thick
And green, then all reported he to God.
"'Til now," said Elohim, "The light of Earth
Hath come reflected but from us. Go to,
Establishing one light to rule the day
And one of lesser power to gleam by night,
That darkness may not give our foe the hold
He seeks to reign triumphant on this star."
And when Jehovah's hand had set these out,
He visited once more the shining globe
To fill it with abundant life of fish
And creatures scaly, winged, from egg and womb

Derived. Deep-swooping near Jehovah's face,
An eagle tested wing and air in play.
His gentle hand outstretched to claw of steel,
He caught the feathered fury in its flight
And said to laughing Michael, "These are free
And yet shall find their rightful place in Heaven,
Though man in ignorance may trap and kill
Beyond his need these bounties rich supplied.
Let this, the Eagle, symbolize them all —
With lion, bear, and dragon full as strong
But not obsessed with freedom quite so much
As this brave bird who boldly teaseth God." (6-7)

Alma 11: Colloquy between Zeezrom and Amulek

"Thou art the devil's child,"
Zeezrom said, most expert at the law.
"Submittest thou to these few questions, asked
To clarify thy known vindictiveness
Against the law?" "If God hath chosen me,
I'll not resist, reserving only such
Replies as not contrary to His word."
"Though man of worth ye be, methinks ye'd shun
No offer of sufficient silver coin
To train thy son before the bar. Thy smile
Emboldens me to tender such a bid,
If thou in turn wilt but deny for me
Existence of such creature ye call God."
"Thou child of hell, why tempt ye me this way?
Though bushels were to spill their slatted sides
With silver, gold, and platinum enough
To fill this valley, peak to peak, ye'd buy
No affirmation. Even in thy black
Conniving heart, thou knowest there's a God.
If I were fool enough to wipe His name
From off my tongue or thine, the loss were ours,
Not His. Put up thy gilded bribe and turn
Thy love to Him and not this tinny trash.
And let this people know, as we both know,
That—even had I chanced salvation's crown—
Thou hadst within thy heart a scheme to rob
Me of the trophy promised if I'd sell
My soul. Upon deceit thou'st based deceit."
"With all thy rant thou holdest to this myth
That God's alive and true?" "He lives. He lives
Or else all dies or never truly lived."
"Exists there in thy view some pantheon,
Or is there but one God?" "One God is all."
"How comes this knowledge unto thee whose fame
Before took root in crass and earthly things?"
"An angel made them known along my way."
"Ye speak of One who'll come. Itinerant
And errant though He be to all who wait,
Is this the Son of God?" "Undoubtedly." (255-56)

Ether 8: Jared's threats against his father, Omer

Then rose up Omer from the loins of Shule
And from him Jared, sly, antithesis
In all of him whose mighty name he bore.
The butter of his tongue grew soft beneath
The heat of blood that fired his yearning for
The throne. By flattery that far out-faced
His acumen and willingness to serve,
He fawned his way to acquisition dear—
Full half the kingdom, then its store he loosed
To build an army restless until its flags
Whipped high on victory's breath above the tents
Of Omer's troops. "Old man, unwittingly
Thy passion mixed too much with pride, with love
Not half enough, the night I was conceived.
Thy crown more than thyself hath caught mine eye
And heart. Nor have I lightly shunned delights
Attendant on my sovereign role as heir.
In candor I admit to savoring
Both pledge of fealty in fatted purse

And gift of female bodies, lusting some
For throne, or else for love's own joys alone,
To boast in cold and wrinkled years ahead
That once a prince—or now a king—had kissed
These lips or stroked those limbs. No man, I trow,
Would turn his back on such delights or prick
Those larger bubbles kingship would attract.
But whatsoever I have done hath moved
Me ever closer to the purple robes
Of governance. As Corihor reined Kib,
So circumscribe I thee thy daily route.
But look not for a spine of paste in me
That tears can melt or turn gelatinous." (86-87)

Joseph and Oliver pray and work together

The Susquehanna splashed along
In piper's tune or swelled to organ tone
Of greenish-black where trees leaned down to play
On snow-fed crest. Here Joseph knelt and signed
For Oliver to do the same. Not since
He broke the silence of his heart within
The grove had Joseph let his diligence
Run quite so wild as now before the Lord.
The months of tribulation, agony
And boyish hope took voice in such a prayer
As Oliver had never heard, at once
A recognition of dependency
And yet insistence of a man secure
In faith that prayer was something less than prayer
Unless an answer came. Amens still hung
Among the leaves when suddenly a man
Appeared. His name evoked in both the youths
Fond kinship as a cousin to the Christ,
A ministry distinguished by its frank
And fearless tone, with water burial
As token of remitted sin. Thus preached
This John until the lust of Herod cost
His dedicated life as bartered price
For wanton dance of sin gone out-of-bounds.
Inheritor and benefactor both,
He'd blessed his Priesthood since that holy day
When angel had proclaimed his birth and tied,
In wonderment, his father's silent tongue.
Triumphant over death and crowned with keys
Which governed temporal affairs, he called
Calm Joseph and the awe-struck Oliver
To kneel upon the grass-soft river bank.
He laid his hands upon their heads, conferred
The Priesthood called in Aaron's name and charged
Them to baptize each other where the stream
Ran calm enough and deep to bury them
In Christ and rise to newness in both life
And purpose. This they did. Upon command,
They laid their hands upon each other, Earth
Thus ratifying Heaven's gift. Thus, John
Did more than mouth mere words of ordination,
Did more than touch with oil untouched by God.
These could just as well be done by priests.
He left for dead all imitative rites
Long stripped of barest authenticity.
Before the glow had dimmed, still full strength
Of Priesthood might was poured upon their heads
By Peter, James, and John, triumvirate
Who bolstered up the Church at Christ's command
And played his absent role.
"We move ahead," said Oliver,
"Far faster than before. Where once the words
Were words alone, they crackle now, alive
And ripe with meaning heretofore unknown.
Nor is this thing we do as purposeless
As once it seemed to be. It's stifled me
At times to turn my back upon the class,
To sacrifice invigorating chats
With students to become a copier
Of someone else's words. But, Joseph, this
Is real! Before, when minister or priest
Might nod, I knew it but a gesture, tossed

My way in empty show of brotherhood
In case some powerful parishioner
Might glance through curtain crack and think
him proud.
But I have felt prophetic hands anoint
My head. Who needs a crumb who has full loaf?"
Then Joseph slapped him on the rump and
laughed.
"Such confidence! But don't reverse your role
With theirs. I think we'll win a few to Christ
Who might have thought they'd always helped
His cause.
But let's get back to work." (418-20)

Nauvoo before the *Expositor* incident

Nauvoo was not serene. Where once the voice
Of Joseph broke alone the quiet air
And unified the Saints, the traitors' tongues
Mocked magpie melodies, harmonious
To those alone who thought their Moses blind
From glare of golden calf, obsequious
To none. Embittered when he called their hands,
They published what the outside world had long
Suspected, feared and even joked about.
But printer's lead inflexibly sets teeth
On edge that else could hold a tongue in
check.
What word and pause and gesture nobly frame
As emanation from the throne of God
In rigid ranks of type translates itself
As little more than vile seduction. Stripped
Of subtlety—persuasion's mannered cloak—
Mere words can march a man to hell who'd
thought
Himself the surest servant of his God.
Inflamed, the Prophet stood aside to let
The man pass judgment in his stead. The lapse
Proved costly. What the Prophet could have
seen,
The man ignored when red-flecked anger
ruled.
Expositor but once, it twice destroyed
Itself in its own garbled type and him
Whose blood would soon dilute its putrid ink.
Let man but threaten Zenger's torch (though
torch
May sadly be applied to burn and not
Cast light on shadowed pertinence), and those
Who otherwise might spit upon its flame
Cry out as if no other light offsets
The darkened void. This Joseph learned—too
late.
Resentment, stored against a score of scrapes,
Engulfed him when he pied the scabrous type.
Where dogma long had spun chimerical
And tenuous conceits on which the law
Could take no grip, this desecrative act
Unleashed the legal hounds and gave them
scent
And sample flesh on which their teeth could
chew. (437-38)

Carthage

The air was still
In Carthage, sticky in the heat of June,
The Mississippi close enough to drink
From streams that leave ground-cover green and
damp.
Mosquitoes, darting gnats and flies balled up
In lazy clouds like halftone dots against
The brassy sky. No Carthage this to test
The might of Rome, her Hannibals asleep
In sweat-stained drilling suits which knew no
wars
And wanted blood to dignify their threads.
A cloud of dust and rattling squeak of wheel
On rock brought life of sorts to Carthage
troops.
"So that's Joe Smith! Which wagon hauls his
wives?"
"His whores—if what we hear be true." "Stand
back
And give a marksman room to save this state
A lot of money it don't have—these floods

And all—that put each man so deep in debt."
"These two are first—and then we burn Nauvoo
And show them Mormon women where the real
Men be!" "You're big, Joe Smith, but we can
melt
You down before Old Scratch can make you
his."
"This silence I maintain is not like me,"
Said Joseph in his brother's ear. "I yearn
To talk these heathen down or wrestle one
For all the stakes. I'd love to get that moose
In grey in such a hammerlock that he'd
Not bend his sweat-striped arm 'til Christmas
Eve."
"I'm glad you keep your counsel to yourself,"
Said Hyrum. "Any word from you, my friend,
And we'd enjoy the shortest courtroom scene
This country ever staged in history."

On the Mormon Trail to Salt Lake

Inquisitive at first and far
From dangerous, the Pawnees harried them
Increasingly, their roving bands too small
To break the nightly fort of wagons ringed
Around the warming fire but large enough
To warrant keeping rifles primed and nigh.
Another foe was mud. Before these plains
Would turn to mile on mile of wheat and corn,
Whose roots would catch the rain and channel
it
To work its miracle of growth, each storm
Would form an endless string of ponds that
wheels
And slogging feet could churn to sucking clay.
If scouts could not detour the train, they slipped
And sloshed and slogged their way across each
black
And sticky sea, their times and miles cut down
As if the imps of hell were domiciled
In mud, determined to cement each wheel
And slimy foot in place. Nor was that all.
As land began to slant or sometimes tilt
Abruptly into hills and then, at last,
To mountains, God—capriciously it seemed—
Changed mud to rock. Whatever stoked
His calcifying fire, the joke paid off.
If mud were torrent, rocks were trial. At best,
Gigantic boulders blocked the charted way.
Possessed, they gnawed at straining ropes, or
slipped
When counted on to hold in place they'd held
For countless centuries. They'd hide a snake
Or skittishly reach out to block a slug
Which, otherwise well aimed, would kill a deer
To fill an empty pot. When wagons fell
On rock, they splintered with a crash which
made
The stony canyons echo with the laugh
Of Lucifer. Perverse and maledictive,
The all-but living rocks provided walls
Against the wind and awning from the rain.
With peak or arch they framed such scenes as
God
Alone could paint. Stone needle housed the
sharp
And bristling nest of eagles who devoured
One noon a sheep which strayed from camp to
feed.
The flanker guard lined beaded sight to breast
And fired as Brigham knocked the shot off-line.
"The sheep is dead, but more are on the way.
Why kill that noble bird whose breed is scarce?
If sheep you need," he said, "take one of mine."
(455-56)

From the Epilogue

Heritage
Suggests, survival may demand that Saints
Devote their leisure time to less routine,
To more complete immersion in the pools
Of excellence in music, dance, the stage,
In poetry's beguiling imagery.
Since when has God demanded mimicry
Above Creation's painful, sweet rewards?
Can publishers rest easily at night

In knowledge that their journals over-praise
Men's bodies, not their minds? As if the harsh
Rich gladiator—whose reward is brass —
Contributes more than he whose genius
Adds new dimensions to the soul of men,
Or reinterprets through his art some truth
Or passion otherwise unborn! The search
For meaning—lone horizon left for man
Whose world boasts few, if any, hidden cracks
—Relies on use man makes of time and art;
He fritters either and can lose his world.
Should Satan take to empty stage and write
What man declines to write—or dance man's
dance —
Then man has wasted more than Eden's hope.
He closes doors to life itself, denies
The sacrifice of Christ for man and finds
His stable world not steel but styrofoam.
Disguised in Innovation's cloak, some art
Will strut deceptive avenues of fame
Until—at length—unmasked by honest men
Unchained to cliques, divorced from claques, it
leads
Its followers to suspect sources, trash
Incapable of reproducing aught
But trash. Some few would paint on film or write
On water, dance on air or pluck a string
Which sounds for all the world as if it stretched
In pain across the voice box of a cat
In heat. When once these giant fakes exhaust
Themselves on Fame's tight-winding treadmill,
Art
Can once again emerge from shadowed stage.
(478-79)

RICHARD Y. THURMAN, a lifelong resident of Utah, spent three years in Africa, Sicily, and Italy with the U.S. infantry in World War II. A graduate of Utah State University, he has been a writer and editor for businesses and the U.S. government and served as director of the University of Utah Press (1964-70). His stories have appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *New Yorker,* as well numerous anthologies, including *The Best American Short Stories* and the *O'Henry Prize Awards.* This paper was presented at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, 20 February 1999, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.

The Unerasable Mormonism of Lance Larsen's *Erasable Walls*

Gideon Burton

With the appearance of his first poetry collection, *Erasable Walls* (New Issues Press, 1998), Lance Larsen, poetry editor for *Literature and Belief* and creative writing faculty member in BYU's English department, proves his craft, firmly establishes his literary persona, and significantly advances the field of Mormon poetry. Larsen might balk at this last description, for he has consciously avoided LDS publishing venues in recent years and has successfully targeted a national audience. (Many of the poems, in fact, are reprinted from the pages of *Paris Review, Salmagundi, Shenandoah,* and other notable venues for poetry publication).[1] He has not, however, avoided populating his poetry with Mormon figures, scenarios, and themes. The result is a book of poetry that avoids parochialism while simultaneously reflecting the author's deep roots in family, religion, the tangibility of God's creation, and a believer's experience within it.

If the spirit of Elijah is manifest in Mormon culture through genealogy and temple work, it is manifest in literature through depictions that evoke a sense of one's connectedness to the past and future, across the many barriers of time and ignorance. Larsen takes us with him on just such a journey, probing with a kind of wistful tenderness, and sometimes with a gentle playfulness, generations past and future. In "Inventing Leona," one of several poems about Larsen's grandparents, the poet latches onto the few images that remain to him of his grandmother—the way she pronounced "Iowa," her cheap floral dresses— but finds that the odd and the incidental details linger more forcefully than the woman herself. He recalls her brother, "who shot off his ear . . . on Thanksgiving" and her sister, "who bottled her wedding ring in a pint of pears." "But Leona," he mourns, "she's lost / in a hand mirror someone's hidden in a drawer."

To compensate for the frustrating and inevitably incomplete nature of our ancestors' lives, Larsen extrapolates, using the craft of poetry to conjure up scenarios whose probability, not factuality, make them true tales, at least in the sense Aristotle suggests in the *Poetics*. In these miniature dramas, Larsen becomes a speaker for the dead, giving flesh to what were only names, names "mapping the erasable walls of the heart" ("February 1922: My Father's Conception").

The act of poetry for Larsen is a sort of unerasing through its evocations—not through nostalgia, but through a kind of resurrection, if you will. There is almost an eeriness to the sense of presence Larsen gives to the past. In "A Place Like That" he recreates his grandmother's loneliness as her husband is off at war. Yet she is not alone. The poet's father is a child in her womb; and as she lies on the Iowa grass, the poet places himself, "floating above, voyeur and incidental /

relative." And whether or not his actual grandmother felt the ripples of darkening grass, "as if / buffalo lived just under the prairie's skin," Larsen brings us to a place where past and present meet in a living interchange of sense.

Larsen just as strongly evokes a sense of current family life, turning the everyday into potent, reflective occasions. The description of a father and son's grimy urban stroll in "Cityscape" yields to an almost romantic discovery of nature hidden in the city when the father seeks a place for the young son to urinate. A husband struggles to understand his sleeping wife in "Dreaming Yourself Pregnant" and tenderly confronts the alienness of gender: "I kiss you / awake, you pin me against shadows. / Still there's too much skin between us." Larsen captures the juxtapositions of the serious and the commonplace that are so much part of family life, blending them freshly. In "Red," for example, a son's loose tooth is placed thematically next to a wife's recovering from miscarriage.

The connections to family in the past and family life in the present that Larsen repeatedly realizes in his poetry suggest one aspect of his work that is strongly Mormon. Another is his use of Mormon settings, such as missionary life, in several of the poems. But in one sense, family or missionary life is only accidental to a more pervasive, substantive Mormon attribute in *Erasable Walls.* This attribute is suggested in the epigraph of the book, a quotation from Melville that claims we must eventually realize that our hopes for "attainable felicity" must be placed not in the intellect, but in the tangibles of material and social existence: "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country" (ix). These are essentially Mormon ideas: we believe we must progress from one state to another, discovering greater grounds for happiness in the process. The grounds for happiness we learn and attempt to perfect in this, our second estate, are the very tangibles of material and social existence that Melville alludes to. We believe that spirit and element, just like man and wife, must be inseparably connected for a fullness of joy (D&C 93:33-34). This is what I find so unerasably Mormon about *Erasable Walls:* Larsen takes us to those moments of progress and transcendence in which the connections between our physical, spiritual, and social worlds are bonded.

The most compelling example of this dynamic in Larsen's collection is "Interview." This poem narrates the awkward confession of a young Latina to the missionary interviewing her for baptism. She does not feel worthy of baptism because of the birth control device in her womb that she has not yet been able to have removed. The poem begins,

> A problem *muy adentro,* she tells him, deep
> inside her—a metal loop like a piece
> of Satan, but the doctor who was supposed
> to remove it on vacation. All the while
> her hands churning at her belt line
> like paddle wheels. To this, add crying.
> And now her question: Can God make her
> clean with this coiled thing still inside?

The diction is matter of fact, saving the moment from mawkishness and evoking a sense of the woman's purity and worthiness in the very frankness of her confession. It also turns the focus of the moment's anxiety to the interviewing elder, a young gringo who has never before interviewed a woman his own age. His discomfort in response to this unwelcome revelation is efficiently communicated by what he stares at:

> Between them,
> a scratch on her mother's kitchen table
> A paring knife and a sliced pomegranate.

As poetry teaches us so well, grappling with the life's abstract difficulties can be mediated by resort to the physical details of existence. In this case, however, the woman's sense of unworthiness for baptism is itself clearly focused on a fact, a material object, that the elder wishes were less tangible, less visible, than the sliced pomegranate on the table. "He does not want to picture the loop," the poem continues. Rather, "He wants / to build a church for her out of words, invite her to pass inside."

This line resonates well beyond the young elder's wish to articulate an answer for the woman. Larsen suggests the religious dimension to building with words generally that he himself enacts in the poems he constructs—sanctifying discrete moments of life through tone and image and the well-chosen word. But if words are churches they are churches with erasable walls, for the suggestive power of language—its power to exceed the confines of its first creation—is always at odds with the bounding, limiting finitude of definitions and set terms. For example, in the poem, although the woman in the interview names the birth control device in her womb obliquely and discreetly, the image provokes in the elder thoughts of the girl's "closed-eyed lovers," and he must avert his eyes quickly from her. Clinging with intellectual conviction that the right words can bring healing and finitude, the elder speaks those religious terms which he hopes will bring order both to her life and to his at that moment:

> *Renewal, font, Jesus—*
> words that hover, then pass between them.
> They seem inside out and too small.

Suddenly the elder's religious language is nothing but abstraction, inadequate for the needs of this moment. A font should be a powerful symbol of renewal, but its lack of emotive force in this instance is suggested by the way Larsen reports it from the elder through a list and through indirect speech: "*Renewal, font, Jesus—*." However, the font image is then reinvested with its evocative power, ironically and accidentally, by the woman. She tells him the city of her birth as he fills out the baptismal recommend,

> *La Cisterna,*
> she says. Cistern. Like this—a vessel,
> a place of water. She makes a pitcher
> out of air, and for an instant, the room
> gathers at her fingers.

For the missionary, the words are not simply an item of information to be carefully lettered on the recommend form. With that visible gesture, "She holds / before him what nestles inside her." Once again, the young interviewee has provided an image more potent in its connotations than she realizes. For the missionary, her womb has been suggested by the way she shapes a cistern in the air with her hands. For the reader, the theme of the poem is suddenly literalized with this nearly archetypal image of the vessel—a woman as vessel of new life; a missionary as vessel for God's word; a vessel of water as a source for physical sustenance; a vessel of water as a font for spiritual birth.

Yet the rebirth in this poem is not the intended baptism of the Latina, but the refashioning of the young elder's world:

> He has crossed some barrier, he knows,
> this boy who in nineteen years has been
> with no one but himself.

A crude reading of the poem would be that a missionary has had impure sexual thoughts prompted by the mention of birth control. But Larsen suggests much more. Across the chasm of culture and the distances of gender and experience, the elder has grown in his awareness of lives otherwise lived, and in humility about the adequacy of abstractions to answer concrete realities. The elder's subsequent response in the poem is prayer, but prayer that is unfamiliar because the tidy abstractions of prayer now seem inadequate:

> He is saying
> what sounds like God's name. Asking
> for something. Darkness maybe. Or blood.
> He knows it has to do with thirst.

A naive reading of the poem's conclusion would be that the elder loses his faith. More accurately, he undergoes a transformation, a maturing, that leaves him hungry—thirsty, as the final word suggests. The closing images are prayer, darkness, blood, and thirst. The missionary has entered his Gethsemane, a place of difficulty, transformation, and potential redemption. As readers, we join him in this awkward, middle position, where the old life with its abstract sureties is metamorphosing in the face of real people and real lives, pomegranates and coiled metal in the womb. His sympathies for the young convert require him to take the physical dimension of her spiritual world seriously, yet he cannot do so without erasing certain walls of intellectual security that have sustained him. As Melville hinted, the missionary must change his expectations of "attainable felicity" and ground them instead in the tangibles of blood and thirst, as did the praying Christ.

Admittedly, this is a difficult posture for Mormon readers to assume. Literature is so much more palatable that conveniently echoes back to us our secure doctrinal certainties. After all, we draw comfort in the carefully erected order of the doctrines and ordinances that define our culture and world view. But just as Christ challenged the neatly ordered but spiritually moribund world of the Pharisees, often our spiritual development requires dissolving self-centered certainties and risking sympathetic exposure to the bloody realities of other human lives. I believe that this is what occurs in "Interview," and more generally across Larsen's poetry. Richard Howard makes the same claim in aesthetic terms in his introduction to *Erasable Walls*. There, he says the effect of Larsen's poem is to "spirit away confines. A characteristic action is one of release, apparent destruction and loss which eventuate in ecstatic illumination" (3). The illuminations in Larsen's poetry of value to Latter-day Saints and non-Mormons alike are achieved not by invoking familiar LDS doctrines, but through the evocations and revelations of palpable detail and tangible tone, in those messy and attained felicities of "the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country."

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NOTES

1. Earlier Larsen published in such Mormon venues as *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and Eugene England and Dennis Clark, eds., *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989): 233-38.

It's Like a Ferris Wheel Ride: Jack Weyland and Contemporary LDS Courtship Traditions

Kristi Bell

Brandon was seventeen when he knew that he would marry Brittany. He and his buddy were playing tennis when they saw two girls a couple of courts away. A game of doubles might not be a bad idea. Brandon and Nathan approached the girls about playing a set. When Brittany turned around, Brandon's life changed forever, but it took him five years to convince her of what he knew in two seconds. Brittany and Brandon dated for two years before his mission. While Brandon was gone, Brittany systematically dated every man at BYU. But when Brandon returned from serving his mission, she soon knew they were to be together forever.

After almost five years, when Brandon decided to ask Brittany to marry him, he bought a canister of tennis balls and performed surgery on one of the balls. He crammed the ring box into the ball and sewed it up as best he could. Then it was back to the tennis courts. He meant to try to lob the ball and have Brittany pick the ball up when it didn't sail over the net. But he was so nervous that he forgot to put the ball into play.

In desperation, after the game he threw it on the ground and said, "Brittany, I've lost a ball. Can you help me find it?" She saw what appeared to be a flat ball and was inclined to leave it on the court. Finally, Brandon picked the ball up himself and said, "There's something weird about this ball. Look at it, Brittany." Shoving it up to her face, he broke the ball open, took out the ring, knelt down on the court where they had met five years earlier, and asked her to marry him (McIntire #2)

Greg and Amber sang together in a musical group in high school. From the time Greg heard the first crystal-clear note that rang from Amber's mouth, he knew that Amber was the one for him. He and Amber belonged to the same group of friends in high school. They were together constantly. In fact you could say Greg and Amber were best friends, but every time he tried to take it a step further, Amber pulled away. Once Greg, Amber, and their friends went up the canyon. As they stood at the summit of a waterfall, they talked about what a romantic place it would be to get engaged. But they also agreed it would be slightly dangerous because it would be so easy to knock the ring out of the guy's hand and have it tumble into the water below.

Well, Greg went on his mission. Amber wrote to him as a friend for the first eighteen months of his mission. Then she met Michael at BYU. Michael was perfect. He was a returned missionary, near graduation, and slated to enter his family's lucrative business. Greg returned from his mission as Amber was planning her wedding to Michael. But her course of true love did not run smooth, and Amber broke up with Michael. Did she turn to reliable Greg? No. She decided to go on a mission. Tired of being the best friend and unwilling to wait for Amber to serve a mission, Greg knew he needed to act quickly before Amber turned in her mission papers.

Accordingly he emptied his bank account and bought a ring for Amber. He drove his pickup over to her house and convinced her to come with him for a ride. They then hiked up to the falls. He, misguided soul, thought that if he gave her the ring at the summit of the falls she would be stunned into accepting him. Instead, she remembered how the group had talked about knocking the ring down the falls. Thinking Greg was playing a joke and that the box was empty, she dropped it. Greg attempted to save it, but it bounced off his hand into the swirling waters below.

Greg's anguished cries convinced Amber that the proposal was on the level. While it took Amber a while to switch from viewing Greg as her best friend to looking at him as husband material, she eventually accepted his proposal. And, with a much cheaper ring, they were finally married (*Lean on Me*).

"Literature reflects life" is an old maxim, but often a useful one. And it is certainly applicable to these two scenarios. One courtship story was told to a student folklore collector while the other summarizes a Jack Weyland novel. It this parallel a fluke, or is there a connection between Weyland's fiction and practical LDS dating practices? Certainly Weyland solves tragedies such as drug abuse, rape, and impending bankruptcy with an ease not found in real life. But something rings true among his too-good-to-be-true tales. And that clear note lies in the customs surrounding the dating and mating of his youthful LDS protagonists.

With the 1980 publishing of *Charly*, Jack Weyland quickly became a familiar name among LDS adolescent readers and their parents. The main characters, Charly and Sam, were unconventional. They had fun, they did the unexpected, but they still loved the gospel. Weyland reached out to young LDS readers and let them know that living the gospel could be a lot of fun—and most of Weyland's target audience already knew that a gospel-centered life did not preclude having fun with the opposite sex.

Long before Charly hit upon the idea of the nearly endless Ferris wheel ride, Latter-day Saint youth were anxiously engaged in creative dating. The Brigham Young University Folklore Archive houses accounts of creative dates that occurred as early as 1977. In the last twenty-two years, more than a hundred focused field projects and individual collections dealing with all aspects of Mormon dating and courtship have been analyzed.

How do Weyland and his cast of characters stack up to the real life woes and joys of LDS youth? In his novels, Weyland creates teens and young adults who live lives larger than reality. While many younger boys have crushes on older girls, how many fourteen-year-old boys would use their life's savings to buy a formal for the sixteen-year-old girl of his dreams to wear to the prom with another guy? And then how many sixteen-year-old girls would end her prom night by waking the fourteen-year-old and dancing with him in his barn? This scenario appears in Weyland's *Brenda at the Prom.*

Weyland even has fun with his excesses. In his short story, "Companions," Weyland writes about one couple: "And so they dated. Their common interests led them to go skiing and play racquetball and swim and go dancing. And that was just on their first date" (*A Small Light in the Darkness*, 87). While rumors abound of Utah prom dates that include trips to Disneyland, dating is generally focused on one activity.

Although Weyland's fictional dating patterns contain a large element of hyperbole, they are more realistic when it comes to their depictions of creative dating. It isn't easy for teens to risk rejection when they ask someone out. Proposing the date in an extravagant or elaborate setting removes the event from the realm of ordinary life, thus providing a psychological safety net for teens that face-to-face invitations lack.

For instance, in 1990 Diane Hansen told collector Michelle Jensen "that she finds asking a guy to be very difficult, especially if she really likes him. Asking a guy creatively is easier to deal with than actually confronting him" (Jensen 6). Diane shared one of her creative invitations:

> I asked a guy out who lived in my ward by having a friend dress up as a clown. Then she went to the guy's house and delivered a singing telegram. It was set [to] the McDonald's "You Deserve a Break Today" song. My friend is very bold and loud, so everyone in the entire complex was hanging out their doors watching. I was a safe distance away, watching. (Jensen 6)

The idea of being "a safe distance away" from the actual asking is an interesting one. Whether consciously or not, the asker in this story insulates herself from the harsh possibility of a refusal or an unenthusiatic acceptance.

Another example of creating a safe atmosphere for asking someone for a date is found in an invitation reported by Sara Wood. One of Sara's friends asked a boy to a Sadie Hawkins Dance by gathering about 150 people "together on this boy's front lawn and on the count of three they yelled: "HEY BILL!! WILL YOU GO TO SADIE HAWKINS WITH DANA?" (Larsen 12).

In addition to friends, parents and siblings also shed inhibitions and participate in the sometimes wacky expanded world of dating. In *Nicole*, Weyland describes a prom night dinner. After Josh picks Nicole up for the prom, they drive around the block and return to her home. A sign out front reads "Famous Restaurant." As they enter the home, they are greeted by Nicole's brother who seats them and hands them menus. Despite what appears to be a choice of items, it is soon clear that the only real choice is roast beef. Soon the "waiter" comes out. He is Nicole's father

> wearing a white dress shirt and slacks, and sporting a wig of curly black hair and a very silly horsehair mustache. Speaking in a false French accent, he said, "Good evening. My name is Chief Vaiter Maurice, and I vil be your vaiter zis evening." (102)

In a similar vein Denise Fargo tells about a date to the girls-choice Preference Dance two of her friends arranged. They "took their dates to a luau . . . held at the home of one the girls. The meal was served by that girl's aunt, uncle, and cousins. They had Hawaiian leis, Hawaiian crepes, fruit drinks, and for a special effect the aunt and uncle did the hula" (McAffee 11).

The participation of family members in this expanded world of dating is important. It reminds the daters of the importance that the LDS faith places on families. As teens and their family members cooperate in planning and executing elaborate dating schemes, they strengthen family ties. Relatives' involvement may also help daters to look ahead to the day when they find their future mate and begin their own families.

BYU students tend to leave creative invitations and dating behind after their freshman year. Weyland's novels, however, do not describe the serious dating that generally precedes marriage but rather adolescent goofing off. Perhaps Weyland resorts to such tactics to keep the attention of the adolescent readers his books are aimed at. Research done by BYU English 311 students indicates that many of their peers hang out in large groups of men and women before settling on a "special someone" they want to officially date. Just as creativity provided a safety net during teen years, college students find safety in numbers.

Folklorist Larry Danielson, writing about religious groups, notes "the necessity of understanding the larger religious context in which the traditions are enacted" (Oring 47) If Danielson is right, then the practices in Weyland's novels and the dating customs of LDS youth must to some extent reflect the doctrines of the LDS Church. After all, teens all over the country date, but it is primarily in locations with a large LDS population that creative dating flourishes. At least, I am not aware of such dating customs among other groups of American teens. Perhaps it is the strong LDS beliefs about chastity, eternal families, the divine nature of the individual, and individual creativity that help form our unique dating customs and have made Weyland a best selling author for Deseret Book.

But perhaps the best reason behind the evanescent world of Weyland dating and creative dating is the need for a story. Children's author and advocate Richard Lewis writes:

> Story is a place of possibility in which we take part in a world that enhances us, enlivens us, and offers us something which we can identify. Through that identification, we grow. We become more than we are. We learn how to get from here to there. (142)

Recently, I spoke to a folklore class about Mormon courtship practices. When we started talking about proposals, I asked the students if they had any stories to share. One newly married man told me that he had just asked his wife to marry him in the course of a conversation. But, when people, especially women, heard he was engaged, they asked how he had proposed. Quickly, he realized that he better propose again so that he would have a story to tell—a story for friends, family, and future children. And most important, it is a defining moment for him and his wife.

Let's return again to the two courtship stories I first told. Both are creative. Both are interesting, almost unbelievable stories. Like other Weyland stories, they both seem to exist outside of real time. However, the loss of the ring in the water will never hurt Greg and Amber's budget as they float through Weyland's novel *Lean on Me*. But Brandon and Brittany have left the tennis court behind. After twenty years of marriage and six children, their story still lives. They tell it to new friends, to co-workers, to their children, and in dating and marriage firesides. James P. Carse discusses the power that repeated stories have, especially stories about life-defining moments. "They exercise great power over our lives and have, as well, rich and enduring lives of their own. When we listen to the resonance of these . . . stories, we find that they can lead us to greater self-awareness and even self-transformation" (232). While I hesitate to say that Weyland's stories change the lives of the LDS youth that read them, I know that, as real-life stories that parallel Weyland's are told, lives can be changed. Shared stories unite friends, siblings, and generations. And ultimately, shared traditions tie lives together in a way that is only faintly echoed through Weyland's fiction. Yes, literature imitates life, but sometimes life is just more powerful.

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NOTE

1. Informants' names are pseudonyms.

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Samuel Woolley Taylor: Mormon Literary Maverick

Richard H. Cracroft

I

Samuel Woolley Taylor (1907-1997), lifelong freelance journalist and prolific author of hundreds of articles and short stories, several novels and film scripts, will be remembered by the American public, if at all, as the screenwriter of Walt Disney's *The Absent-Minded Professor.* Mormon and Western American literary critics and historians, however, will remember Taylor for his other career as a maverick Mormon journalist/historian, who, through nine volumes of Mormon Americana, entertained, instructed, corrected, and irritated readers in his important but sometimes skewed chronicling of the *Götterdämmerung* of the fifty-year-social experiment that was Mormon polygamy.

Despite his natural and deep affinities for the Mormon people, Taylor spent the Mormon half of his long career rubbing the noses of Mormon officialdom in the shaded gaps between historical "Truth" as he saw and interpreted it and the managed historical revisionism of what he called "the controlled press" of the twentieth-century Mormon Church ("Little," 108).

Following the groundbreaking lead of Fawn McKay Brodie's controversial psycho-biography, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (1945), Taylor wrote *Family Kingdom* (1951), a spritely *Father Knows Best*-type of family biography about his father, John W. Taylor, a fallen-from-grace Mormon apostle, polygamist husband of six wives, and father of thirty-six children.

In narrating the story of his remarkable father and family, Samuel W. Taylor became the first popular historian to tell the inside story of Mormon polygamy and its immediate aftermath. Heartened by the national success of *Family Kingdom* and by the fact that the Church had not cut him off, as he had feared it would (*Tales* 196), Taylor, assisted by his brother and inveterate researcher Raymond W. Taylor, wrote a trilogy of Mormon biography and history, *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (1971), *The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (1976), and *Rocky Mountain Empire: The Latter-day Saints Today* (1978). In 1984 he and his brother capped their literary collaboration with a two-volume documentary history, *The John Taylor Papers: Records of the Last Utah Pioneer*. His last book, *Taylor-Made Tales* (1994), is a delightful retrospective memoir in which he reflects upon the complex of historical givens that influenced his life and shaped the content and tone of his Mormon corpus.

In speaking out so vigorously on a topic long deemed taboo among Mormons, Taylor won the reputation of an in-your-face Mormon maverick. As such, he is often assigned to that regional group of dissident and (mostly) ex-Mormons and fellow-traveler Gentiles whom Edward A. Geary has dubbed "Mormonism's Lost Generation."

This group of largely expatriate Mormons includes, in addition to Taylor and Fawn M. Brodie, novelists Vardis Fisher, Paul Bailey, Ardeth Kennelly, Maurine Whipple, and Virginia Sorensen, and novelists/historians Bernard DeVoto and Wallace Stegner, a notable pair of Gentiles with Utah roots.

But Taylor saw himself not as a dissident, but "as an author standing apart" (*Tales* 186). In fact, a closer look at his life and works will show that he fits more comfortably into the company of maverick Mormons, often called "Jack Mormons." While running at the fringes of the herd, attempting to maintain a critical distance which enables greater objectivity and maneuverability, they still participate in and identify with Mormonism's society, history, and folkways. I define dissident Mormons, on the other hand, as graduate-mavericks who have detached themselves from the herd, spiritually, emotionally, doctrinally, socially, and physically—something Taylor could never do.

He relished his self-proclaimed maverick status and, in a book review, identified Mormon novelist Paul Bailey as "a fellow maverick," adding, "I wear the badge proudly" ("You Can't" 106). In one of the many letters Taylor and I exchanged during two decades as correspondents, Taylor asserted, "I've never pretended to qualify as anything but a Jack Mormon, defined by my brother Raymond as 'A Seagull which won't eat crickets'" (Letter 1981). The metaphor is apt, for, while Taylor the innate skeptic took pleasure, for example, in footnoting a comment on the paucity of historical evidence for the miracle of "The Coming of the [Cricket-Eating] Seagulls" (*Kingdom or Nothing* 142, n. 4), the cumulative evidence of his Mormon books is that, after all, he accepted that such miracles had probably occurred, and he matter-of-factly reported supernatural events in LDS history.

Assessing the accomplishment of Samuel W. Taylor as Mormon journalist, fiction writer, biographer, historian, and pundit is complicated by the oxymoronic complexity of the man himself. At once believer and skeptic, orthodox and heterodox, defender and debunker, proud of his Mormonness, yet chronic doubter of institutions generally and the Mormon hierarchy in particular, affirmer and iconoclast, defender of the faith and whistle-blower at falsehood, admirer of spiritual greatness and opponent of hypocrisy and lily-gilding, Taylor spent the Mormon half of his literary career tilting at the windmill of his church's revisionist and preferred public image and persona. As an upstart and from-the-hip historian with a compelling, largely untold and nigh-forbidden story to tell, Taylor rendered his colorfully subjective take on the Mormon story with verve and excitement and in an engaging style laden with rich detail, wonderful anecdotes, and the ironic sense which have led some to dub him the "Mark Twain of Mormonism."

The resulting iconoclastic, impressionistic, sock-it-to-em histories-with-a-twist may have discomfited historians but have enriched Mormon letters, historiography, culture—and the Mormon people. Taylor's books of Mormon Americana continue to be of inestimable value to a people still struggling to maintain their "peculiar" peoplehood while assessing the meaning of a strange, rich, and colorful history that is, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied, "a marvelous work and a wonder" (Isa. 29:1). Affected but undeterred by that "peculiar past," the modern Church has gone about its business of forging a popular, expanding, mainline yet international body.

II

Understanding Samuel Woolley Taylor's stance as a Mormon historian compels an understanding of the whirling tempest of Mormon *Realpolitik* into which he was born on February 5, 1907, to Janet ("Nettie") Maria Woolley Taylor, the third of John W. Woolley's six wives. Sam was the seventh of Janet's eight and one of John W.'s thirty-six children born under "the Principle" of Mormon plural marriage, as faithfully practiced by his parents. Taylor's father, LDS apostle John Whittaker Taylor (1858-1916), a dynamic, deeply spiritual and visionary man, was often called "the Prophet of the Quorum." He died when Sam was eight (*Tales* 187), but his presence in Sam's life remained indelible and profound and would play a great role in shaping his historical and literary *Weltanschauung*.

Equally important in understanding Taylor is the fact that his grandfather, John Taylor, third president of the Mormon Church (1880-1887), was the revered, last-ditch defender of the Principle against the onslaught of monogamist Gentiles who had made "the Mormon Problem" their *cause célèbre*. During the 1880s, the federal government clamped down on polygamy with a series of draconian measures: confiscation of Mormon property, disenfranchisement, and imprisonment of hundreds of polygamists, male and female, on charges of unlawful cohabitation. At the height of the Raid, as the Mormons called it, President Taylor reportedly received a revelation in which the Lord commanded that the Church should never cease its divinely mandated practice of plural marriage, regardless of outside pressures. "I have not revoked this law," the Lord told Taylor, "nor will I, for it is everlasting and those who will enter my glory must obey the conditions thereof" (*John Taylor Papers* II:468). Rather than conform to the demands of newly minted human laws, President Taylor lived his last several years in hiding. In July 1887, still on "the Underground," he died, a defiant fugitive unwilling to grant the government a symbolic victory by joining hundreds of other Mormon men who were serving time in the Utah Territorial Penitentiary for "unlawful cohabitation."

In 1890, Wilford Woodruff, Taylor's aged successor and fourth president of the Church (1889-1898), bowed to terrific governmental pressure and announced a "Manifesto" officially ending Mormonism's public support for new plural marriages. Because the decree was accepted by the Latter-day Saints as revelation and thus binding upon the Church, the Manifesto supplanted John Taylor's earlier revelation.

Six decades following the M74anifesto, however, and much to the discomfiture of twentieth-century Mormon leaders and comfortably monogamous Latter-day Saints, John Taylor's grandson, Samuel, published his grandfather's suppressed revelations to a new and surprised generation of Latter-day Saints. Taylor's thesis, articulated and documented in several of his Mormon studies, is that the Saints, many of them purportedly authorized by various General Authorities, secretly continued the practice of polygamy for more than two decades after the Manifesto (Quinn 1985, 1998; Van Wagoner 1986), under the policy first followed in Nauvoo, Illinois, that "the right hand doesn't care to know what the left hand is doing." Until 1904, polygamy continued to be practiced, with Church approval, in the Mormon colonies of northern Mexico and in southern Alberta, Canada, although it was outlawed but still overlooked in both countries. In Utah, however, it was officially and legally forbidden. However, Sam's father, caught between two contradictory imperatives, chose to carry out his father's charge to keep polygamy alive. With others, and in defiance of civil and Church law, he married three additional wives after the Manifesto—and reaped the whirlwind.

In the hearings in the U.S. Senate (1904-1906), held to determine whether monogamist Reed Smoot (1862-1941), newly elected senator and apostle, could retain his seat. President Joseph F. Smith, the sixth president of the Church, subpoenaed to testify, was embarrassed by the overwhelming evidence that plural marriages, many sanctioned by Church leaders, were continuing in Utah, even though it had outlawed the practice in its constitution. On the witness stand, President Smith testified that he had continued to cohabit with his own plural wives and that he had children born after 1890. "Faced with intense pressure," writes Harvard W. Heath in the quasi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, "Church leaders accepted the resignations of apostles Matthias F. Cowley and John W. Taylor, who were rumored to have performed plural marriages after the Manifesto" (3:1363-4). Under threat of more legal action against his people, President Smith issued what would later be called the "Second Manifesto," mandating excommunication for those who entered into new plural marriages from that time on.[1]

The forced resignations of Cowley and John W. Taylor occurred in October 1905, two years before Sam's birth. John W. had been an apostle since 1884. Unwilling to recant or to renounce his wives, Taylor was excommunicated in March 1911. His public disgrace changed forever his life and the lives of members of his large family. Sam would write that his father was forced into "the whipping boy role of an apostate" and quietly endured the social ostracism and poverty that followed. Loyal to his church, even in rejection, the former apostle turned away members of new fundamentalist groups who sought him out for leadership (*Tales* 201-202). When it came to renouncing plural marriage, however, the former apostle remained steadfast and unrepentant—and thus unchurched—until his death in 1916.

Four decades later, his sons Sam and Raymond undertook the daunting task of placing these events in an objective historical context. *Family Kingdom* became the first shot fired in the battle to restore John W.'s blessings to him posthumously. Taylor presents convincing evidence that his father and fellow-apostle Matthias Cowley had been sacrificial lambs on the altar of Mormon accommodation, to assure the outraged public that the Church would not try to resuscitate polygamy, and to save Reed Smoot's Senate seat. The Church was naturally reluctant to reinstate a former apostle who had, at a critical juncture, embarrassed the Church by flouting its mandates, since such a move could be read as condoning his actions. However, thirty-nine years after John W.'s death, Sam and Raymond persuaded Church president David O. McKay to lift the ban; and in 1965, John W. Taylor was "taken out of the shadows," restored, posthumously, to membership in the Mormon Church and reinvested with all his former priesthood and temple blessings.

III

This complex of little-known events in an obscure region at the turn-of-the-nineteenth century changed the course of Latter-day Saint history and defined Samuel Woolley Taylor's *Weltanschauung* and literary career. As he recalls in *Taylor-Made Tales*, Sam grew up in Provo, Utah. He had plenty of cousins around him. Three other wives—Aunt Nellie, Aunt Roxie, and Aunt Rhoda—lived on adjoining fruit farms. (The other two wives, Aunt May and Aunt Ellen, and their children lived in Salt Lake City.)

Taylor, who decided early on a career as a professional writer, also showed his maverick tendencies very early. While attending Brigham Young University in his hometown, he contributed a weekly column, "Taylored Topics," to the semi-weekly student newspaper, Y *News*. He reveled in disconcerting BYU administrators, faculty, and students at the conservative Mormon school with his "the emperor has no clothes" approach to sensitive subjects, voicing controversial opinions and publishing sensational exposés which illuminated the gap between LDS ideals and student realities. Accordingly, Sam left college in his senior year under duress. The last straw had been a column about some of the unusual ways BYU students were earning a living in Depression America. Sam's interview with an anonymous student bootlegger caused a sensation at the teetotaling-and-proud-of-it school. He recalls:

> The ink was hardly dry on the *Y News* before I was on the carpet. When I refused to name the suspected bootleggers, I was suspended. After I was reinstated, the next column picked off the scab, and I was out again. The pattern repeated itself until after the sixth suspension. . . . I dropped out. After all, I can take a hint. (*Tales* 124)

Sam immediately determined that "It was going to be sink or swim as a writer" (*Tales* 125). In 1934, he married Gay Dimick, a fellow writer whom he met at BYU. The newlyweds moved to Gay's native California—to allow her to escape, Sam explains, the omnipresent Taylors. In a long and successful freelance writing career, he published to a large national readership almost every type of fiction and nonfiction, including detective stories, westerns, sports, adventure, humor, and a play, *The Square Needle*, in addition to his nine volumes of Mormon biography, history, and memoir. His stories run into the hundreds, many of them published serially in such mass-circulated magazines as *Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, Liberty, American, Country Gentleman, Woman's Home Companion, Esquire, True, Argosy, Bluebook, Country Home, Reader's Digest, Holiday,* and *Family Circle (Tales* 164). Some of his magazine material was recycled to become books and motion pictures. Articles in *Holiday* later were rewoven into *Family Kingdom* (1951) (*Tales* 195); and his exposé, *I Have Six Wives: A True Story of Present-Day Plural Marriage* (1956), first appeared in *True* magazine.

The Man with My Face (1962), a six-part mystery in *Liberty* (1948), became both a book club selection and a motion picture. Even better known are his scripts for Walt Disney, *The Absent-Minded Professor,* which starred Fred McMurray, and its sequel, *Son of Flubber. (The Absent-Minded Professor,* still crediting Taylor, was remade in 1998 as *Flubber*, starring Robin Williams.) He received royalties for his idea for *The Flying Car* (later *Chitty-Chitty Bang Bang)*, although another writer did the screenplay. In 1970, Taylor collaborated with Raymond in parlaying the uranium boom in southeastern Utah into *Uranium Fever; or, No Talk Under $1 Million.* Prolific to the end, he also wrote two dozen articles, notes, and reviews for the two leading independent Mormon journals, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* and *Sunstone.*

Events during his military service in World War II played a role in returning Taylor to his Mormon roots. In 1943, at age thirty-six, Sam was drafted into the U.S. Army and eventually sent to England where he fought the war, he says, "with my own weapon—a typewriter" (*Tales* 135), as a correspondent assigned to the Air Force Public Relations Office. During the war, he continued to churn out, he notes in his memoirs, "hundreds of stories and articles in national magazines, but nothing about the Mormon culture, despite my heritage" (*Tales* 161). He may well have continued this popular and lucrative course except for an airplane crash that killed two soldiers. Sam himself barely escaped with his life. After this terrifying experience, he mused, "So I was being led toward what goal?" and "wondered if I had been spared because of my ability to write about my people for readers of the outside world" (161). Hugh B. Brown, a Canadian and president of the British LDS Mission (later an apostle and member of the First Presidency), affirmed to Sam one Sunday evening not long after his brush with death that the Mormon people needed Samuel Taylor to tell their story to the world. He pointed out to Sam:

> Our internal literature was largely intended for and read by the LDS people. Also, most literature about Mormons in national trade channels was critical or anti-Mormon. With my talent as an author, [Brown] said, I could bring understanding and appreciation for my people to an audience who couldn't be reached by the hard sell of the missionary approach. (*Tales* 164)

Taking Brown's advice to heart, Taylor researched, wrote and published *Family Kingdom* in 1951. His first nonfiction book, it has been the most enduringly popular of his Mormon works; and he described it as "the first book for the outside world which portrayed plural marriage as a way of life, without apology or condemnation" (*Tales* 162).

Even though he felt he was responding to Brown's authoritative call to thus portray his people, he had done it his own way, true to his thoroughgoing maverick nature. As his daughter Sara Taylor Weston insists, he was "fiercely proud of his membership in the church."

For a number of years after his marriage, Taylor had been, he admits, "strictly an 'eating' Mormon" (meaning that he showed up only at ward dinners) and "remained inactive until three years after *Family Kingdom* was published in 1951" (*Tales* 196). After realizing that the book would not get him excommunicated, as he had feared, Taylor tentatively reactivated himself and remained at a self-chosen level of activity, including the temple rites, for the rest of his life. Ever the maverick, he traveled at the edge of the Mormon herd. Daughter Sara reports that Sam consistently refused his bishops' invitations to attend sacrament meeting over the years by explaining, "If I go to sacrament meeting, you'll expect more of me than I want to give." At the same time, however, Sam served for many years as secretary to his high priest group, which he faithfully attended, even though he was never ordained a high priest. Sam's sense of belonging is reflected in several anecdotes about the members and activities of the Redwood City Ward, which he cheerily describes in *Rocky Mountain Empire* and *Taylor-Made Tales*. Indeed, despite his testy and maverick propensities, the Mormon Church remained a central focus of his life, and he confessed, not long after recommencing activity in his Redwood City ward:

> I made the remarkable discovery that the Wasatch Front wasn't confined to Utah. It wasn't a matter of geography, but of people. The Redwood City California Ward was exactly like the Fourth Ward of Provo. The Peculiar People in it were as interchangeable as Ford parts. A member could move from Provo to Redwood City on Monday, be visited by the bishop, [be] assigned a job, and be a functioning part of the intricate mechanism by the following Sunday. And, I realized, like it or lump it, I was one of the Peculiar People, home again. (*Tales* 203)

Still, while his work, especially *Family Kingdom*, gentled the craggy image of Mormons among his non-Mormon readers, the same work earned him, among the Latter-day Saints, the reputation of a turn-over-the-manure-pile iconoclast and insensitive maverick who told more than he should about subjects better left alone—for the good of his people. His pugnacious stance occasionally placed him in conflict with received and conservative views; and he saw himself, like his father and grandfather, as fighting a lonely battle—in his case against "the managed press" of the Church. Although he occasionally detected rumblings, he never received any official rebuke by Church authorities for any of his books. While Taylor never mellowed in his positions, he lived to enjoy the burnishing of his reputation which came with the increasing self-confidence of the Mormon people. He saw the reissuing of *Family Kingdom* (1974) and *Heaven Knows Why!* (1972, 1994), his hilarious Mormon comedy, both of which had raised Saintly hackles on first publication. "The answer seems to be," Taylor wrote me, "to live long enough" (Letter 1970). Increasingly, his Mormon works have come to be regarded as significant and groundbreaking; and in 1996, he was gratified to be accorded Honorary Lifetime Membership by the Association for Mormon Letters. He was likewise pleased to read William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen's kind but guarded tribute, in introducing a reprint of one of his pieces: "No talented native son knows Utah better than Samuel W. Taylor, who writes about it so gaily and so aptly" (*Tales* 173). Perennially vigorous and feisty, Samuel Woolley Taylor remained a perpetual, genial maverick, critic, and setter-to-rights until his death at age ninety on 26 September 1997, at the home he built for himself and Gay in Redwood City, California.

At Sam Taylor's side as indefatigable researcher and aide in producing his Mormon Americana was his brother, Raymond W. Taylor, whose maverick views resembled those of his brother. It was Raymond who haunted the LDS Church Historian's Office and typed out hundreds of letters of their grandfather, John Taylor; it was Raymond, who, in getting the record made public, had several encounters with LDS General Authorities who did not wish to reignite old conflagrations which they thought were best left extinguished and forgotten. In his Introduction to *The Kingdom or Nothing*, Sam wrote that the book "really should be [Raymond's] book," and would have been, except for Raymond's writing style, which Raymond himself called "reformed Egyptian" (x).

An anecdote about Raymond illustrates the maverick natures of both brothers. Raymond and I shared the same Provo Utah East Stake and I was a neighbor to his sister, Ruth Taylor Williams. We occasionally conversed about Mormon history and soon became friends. One Sunday morning, as a visiting high councilor, I was in official attendance in Raymond's high priest group, when Raymond took the floor to report a miracle. He related how the building which housed his office had nearly burned down the evening before. On being turned away from the building by firemen who ignored his pleas to let him dash in and save years of priceless research on John Taylor, he went, in despair, across the street to the Trade Winds Cafe, where he sat all night, drinking coffee, praying, drinking more coffee, and praying harder—a combination of actions which is, from a Mormon point of view, oxymoronic and decidedly un-Mormonic. "And," he told his unperturbed brethren, "I'll be damned if the Lord didn't save the building and my papers." In response to this story, which I reported to Sam after Raymond's death, Sam wrote me that it had been a real test of Raymond's faith when

> Joseph Fielding Smith became our Prophet, Seer and Revelator. Raymond had clashed with him (as had I) when Brother Joseph was Church Historian. Now he was untouchable. The situation worried Raymond until he said, "I went to the Lord. I told the Lord that if He would take Brother Joseph, I'd quit coffee." The very next day Joseph died, and, Raymond told me, "I haven't wanted a cup of coffee since." Which is a testimony to something or other. (Letter 1985)

Such desires to beat the establishment deepened the Taylor brothers' quixotic and maverick resolves to engage the windmill without disrespecting the wind. They saw themselves not as dissidents but as writers with an eye single to telling the truth—as they saw it—about the Lord's "only true and living church" (D&C 1:30) as imperfectly directed by fallible mortals.

IV

"Truth Forever Triumphant" is the inscription on Samuel W. Taylor's gravestone in Provo

City cemetery. He saw himself as a seeker, publisher of truth, and bringer of light to shadowed and neglected corners of Mormon history, regardless of the consequences, especially when such truth could unsettle institutional self-righteousness, provoke smug and complacent members, and excite what Leonard J. Arrington called "an amazing number" of LDS readers who were reading Taylor's *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (1971) and were apparently hungry for "the history of 'real' people" (*Adventures of a Church Historian* 165). In his nine volumes of Mormon Americana, he accomplished just that. It is with Taylor's sometimes skewed rendering of historic truth, which carried what Arrington called, writing of the reception of *Nightfall at Nauvoo*, "a tone of innuendo that caused some . . . to regard it as sensationalist" (164), that LDS and western historians take issue.

From the beginning, Mormon leaders and Church historians have told the Mormon story with an eye to hastening the providential destiny of the Church. Tracing a pattern of divine direction and intervention in the Mormon saga through its small beginnings in 1830 to the rapid international expansion of the present era, most Mormon writers have undertaken to show the Saints as a spiritually vibrant, monogamous, family-centered, loyal, law-abiding and unified people, who share Mormonism's sense of divine destiny and purpose with nearly a half-million new converts each year. To encourage the missionary effort, Mormon leaders and establishment historians have consistently taken a "best-foot-forward" and "don't-step-in-anything-on-the-way" stance. They look askance at secular historians who delve into the gritty minutiae of history, tracing human causes of petty and not-so-petty squabbles, in-house or national politics, or other distracting unpleasantries, without crediting the providential hand.

These same Mormon leaders and historians are eager to deflect the accumulation, across an often turbulent history, of negative images of the Saints as rebels, polygamists, or racists. Church leaders frown on dissenting and potentially divisive scholarly probing of the past as misguided opposition to the faith's inevitable destiny.

Samuel W. Taylor saw it differently. His personal involvement in the aftermath of polygamy and his innate distrust of institutions, together with his skepticism about events that others deem divinely guided, caused him to assume that behind every effect lurked a human and thus ulterior and probably nefarious cause, regardless of original and well-meant intentions.

This skepticism shaped his method of exposing the historic incongruities and not-so-cosmic ironies of Mormonism. As a young columnist for the BYU student newspaper, Taylor took the characteristic, pugnacious stance toward forbidden topics which he would take throughout his career as exposé journalist and shock-it-to-em historian. His method was to dust off little-known, overlooked, dismissed, forgotten, or unpopular historical events, persons, or facts, and, through research and skillful handling, reinstate them—newly assessed, fully developed, and clothed in enhanced significance—to their refreshed historical contexts. Still, while Taylor makes a genuine contribution by shining light into darkened corners of history, his muckraking and exposé-driven journalistic propensities make suspect any claims he might make of evenhanded historical objectivity. While Taylor is a consummate storyteller with a flair for the dramatic, he is also a sensational historian who takes lip-smacking delight in upsetting the received standard notions of history through exposing perceived historical anomalies and eccentricities, usually at the expense of the establishment, which he takes obvious pleasure in baiting. In fact, Taylor's zealous attempts to tell the truth, while admittedly, in Arrington's words, "imaginative and entertaining" (164), often lead him into distorting and thus skewing the very history he is trying to correct.

His cavalier tone and subjective brand of dramatic and sensational journalism, together with his fiction writer's penchant for insufficient documentation, and his insertion, especially in *Nightfall at Nauvoo,* of imagined dialogue between historic figures, combine to make historians and history buffs suspicious of his "fictional histories" and "historical fictions" and have caused some readers to place a mental asterisk by Taylor's name, which reads: "Tasty fare—to be taken with several grains of salt."

V

A quick survey of Taylor's only Mormon novel and his five Mormon biographies and histories reveals not only his consistent choice of the sensational subject, but his skill in deconstructing and redressing conventional treatments of sensitive Mormon topics, as he plays David to Mormonism's Goliath. In two of his nonfiction books, however, he applies his techniques to sensational but non-Mormon subjects. In *I Have Six Wives: A True Story of Present-Day Plural Marriage* (1956), the U.S. government and the States of Arizona and Utah become the Goliaths as Taylor examines the lives and struggles of twentieth-century polygamists in Short Creek, Arizona, with whom he professes a sympathetic affinity. On the other hand, get-rich-quick human nature and governmental bumbling—not polygamy—are the Goliaths of *Uranium Fever: or, No Talk Under $1 Million* (1970). This book, written with Raymond, describes the uranium boom that erupted in southeastern Utah in the 1950s and '60s. In both books, as in each of Taylor's five major works of Mormon history and biography, his method is exposé journalism, and he lays bare the perfidy and foolishness of whatever monolith looms as the enemy.

Even in his delightful (and only) Mormon novel, *Heaven Knows Why!* (1948), a *tour de farce* which he first published serially in *Collier's* as "The Mysterious Way," Taylor, while avoiding any mention of polygamy, capitalizes on Mormon idiosyncracies, quaintness, naivete, clannishness, and such doctrinal peculiarities as personal revelation, temple sealings, and the Word of Wisdom. The result delighted the general/Gentile public of 1948, while alienating hypersensitive Latter-day Saints. Prologued and epilogued in a Mormon bureaucratic Heaven, the novel presents a worried angel, Moroni Skinner, who is distracted from his work in "the Compiling Office of the Accounting Section of the Current History Division of the Records Department" (1), by concerns about his shiftless and lazy grandson, Jackson Skinner Whitetop. Young Jack's Jack-Mormon ways so distract Moroni that he is passed over for advancement to "Chief Checker of the Compiling Office." Granted permission to make one visitation to his grandson in a remote west Utah valley to straighten things out, Moroni bumbles his way through a visitation but providentially sets in motion a series of hilarious events that expose hypocrisy, solve old feuds, right old wrongs, strengthen faith, vitalize Jackson, and, in the nick of time, help Jackson wrench the hand of Bishop Jensen's lovely daughter Katie from her father's base and hypocritical counselor.

Although Taylor's story—still the funniest Mormon novel—is innocuous and could be set in virtually any tight society, Mormons in 1948 were still in the throes of accommodation, and didn't like the novel. "The Saints not only didn't see the humor," he later wrote, "but some of them didn't realize the story was fiction." In the process he learned, as he wrote in his preface to the 1994 reprint, "that Mormons are passionately proud of being the Peculiar People, but heaven help the author who points out the peculiarities" (vii). He later recalled, "They scalped me in 'Zion,' saying I was making light of sacred things" (*Tales* 167). In fact, it was not until thirty years later that a sufficient number of Saints were able to see *Heaven Knows Why!* as the "sugar-coated sermon on the power of faith" he intended. "I do remember most vividly the formal call of my ward bishopric (no doubt on orders from On High), to question the condition of my soul, at the time "The Mysterious Way" [*Heaven Knows Why*] ran in *Collier's*" (Letter to Cracroft, 1980).

Taylor's literary *raison d'être* is less about Mormons as "a peculiar people" generally, and more about the "peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9) who practiced polygamy for a half-century (ca. 1840-1890) before being forced to surrender by the U.S. government. Family life in plural marriages and the circumstances of polygamy's fitful demise became Taylor's premier subject in his charming memoir and five Mormon histories and biographies.

In *Family Kingdom* (1951), Taylor found his *metier* and produced his *magnum opus*. This attractive family memoir *cum* history, still in print, is an upbeat, frequently comical and breezily respectful account of his father's much-married family life. The book sold well, was an alternative Book-of-the-Month selection, and was distributed abroad by the U.S. government as examplary Americana. *Family Kingdom* is the story of Mormon apostle John W. Taylor's matchless combination of eccentricity, entrepreneurship, enthusiasm, and faith—all of which Taylor crafted into Mormon literature's most delightful family saga and most readable biography.

But while the book charmed a nation of readers with its sympathetic portraits of misunderstood Mormon multiplicities, it also sent chills up the collective and sensitive Mormon spine. In the 1950s, the Latter-day Saints, who had just contributed importantly to the war effort, were eager to distance themselves from past peculiarities. Just at this precise juncture Sam Taylor, insisting that "the story of family life in plural marriage had never been honestly or accurately told," and eager to write an "an honest book" which would tell the whole truth (186), even about forbidden topics, the publication of which would embarrass mid-century Mormons and large numbers of Taylors, who disapproved of, among other things, Sam's lighthearted chronicling of John W. Taylor's eccentricities, excesses, and comical dilemmas—such as taking along five of his six wives and children to the Strawberry on his honeymoon with his sixth wife. Recalls Sam: "And a gala time was had by all" (272).

Above all, the Saints disapproved of Taylor's close, generally "unspiritual," and unrepresentative attention to the politics, intrigues, and compromises that accompanied polygamy's sputtering demise. When word about his project got about, Sam recalls, "A number of people . . . tried, with various degrees of tact, to dissuade me from writing the book." The consensus was, he says, "that I was too 'negative' and unspiritual to write the typical 'family' book." "This was completely true," he agrees. "I had no intention of doing a family mug job. I wanted an honest book" about a Mormon polygamous family. He reasoned, "as I was one of the very last to have grown up in [plural marriage], who would tell this story if I didn't?" (*Tales* 186).

Writing *Family Kingdom* forced the heterodox-liberal-skeptic maverick Taylor into the sometimes uncomfortable position of defending his father and grandfather's hard-core positions as pre- and post-Manifesto polygamists. At the same time, he also found himself defending and affirming their visions, deep spirituality, and belief, inspired unilateral decisions, and their acts of rebellion against government and/or Church, all the while maintaining his ironic distance and displaying his penchant for exposé. In writing *Family Kingdom*, Taylor wrenched open tightly closed barn doors and exposed the accumulation of dross which had piled up around polygamy. The book, warmly human but too anecdotal and historically imprecise for most historians, remains the best narrative account of Mormonism's difficult transition into the mainstream of American religions.

Taylor maintains this tight-rope walk between history and exposé in his Mormon history trilogy, *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (1971), *The Kingdom or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (1976), and *Rocky Mountain Empire: The Latter-day Saints Today* (1978). The first book, *Nightfall at Nauvoo* (1971), "is," says Taylor,

> the story of the Mormon pioneer city which quickly grew to become the largest city in Illinois—twice the size of Chicago—before being abandoned as the Saints crossed the plains to Utah. Here was an epic story and I did a long book about it. (*Tales* 168)

Taylor's history of the Nauvoo era is really a history of the role of polygamy in the deaths of Joseph Smith and Nauvoo. Eager to correct what he perceived as a pro-Mormon, "managed- press" imbalance in the history of the Missouri and Illinois persecutions and the assassinations of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Taylor, taking a position decidedly at odds with official Mormon history, says that

> it is time to take a balanced and objective viewpoint. The Mormon story concerning persecution of a blameless people must be reexamined; certainly the violent history of the Saints prior and subsequent to Nauvoo shows that they couldn't get along with their neighbors *anywhere.* From the perspective of more than a century we must accept as a basic concept that both the Mormons and the Gentiles were, by and large, good people, and that each side of the conflict was sincerely motivated. We must examine these motivations, while keeping in mind that the cause of Nauvoo's fall came not only from outside enemies but also from dissension within the gates. (*Nauvoo* 10)

Nightfall at Nauvoo received mixed reviews from historians. While the book boasts a good bibliography of non-Mormon sources, Taylor included no foot- or endnotes; and his generally well-paced and colorful narrative both irritates and entertains readers by his use of imagined conversations packed with historical detail. The result is neither good fiction nor good history. The book begins with a retrospective conversation between Colonel Thomas L. Kane, long-time benefactor of the Mormon people, and Dr. John M. Bernhisel, Mormon spokesman in Washington, D.C. The fact-laden conversation introduces portions of Kane's romantic lecture on Nauvoo-as-deserted-village which he delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, rehearses the Mormon story up to the flight from Nauvoo, and establishes polygamy as the principal cause of the city's fall. Taylor recounts the history of the city through a series of imagined conversations between and among a number of historical figures: Joseph and Emma Smith, dissidents John C. Bennett and William Law, virulent anti-Mormon John Sharp, colorful Sam Brannan and Porter Rockwell, Sidney Rigdon and his daughter Nancy, Pratt brothers Orson and Parley P., John Taylor, and Brigham Young. Typical of Taylor's history-as-conversation is this exchange between William Smith, Joseph's brother, and Sam Brannan, about a scheming and power-hungry Brigham Young:

> While in seclusion from the deputies, William said, Brigham was correcting Joseph's history. Sam [Brannan] looked at him curiously. Correcting? Yes, William said—taking Rigdon out and putting Brigham in.
>
> Sam [Brannon] saw clearly that William and Brigham would come to a parting of the ways. And Sam didn't want to be backing the wrong horse.

A few moments later, on meeting Brigham Young, the reader gets the facts:

> Sam [Brannan] was surprised that Brigham was a head shorter than he and William. But Brigham—carpenter, glazier, painter—had burly shoulders, a handclasp that almost made Sam count his fingers afterward. (Nauvoo 327)

With too-little regard for the credibility of his sources, Taylor shifts the anomalous and sensational in Mormon history from obscure and tentative footnotes to page center. For example, he introduces, without qualification and democratically, as if all sources are created equal, a number of attacks by such apostate Mormons as John D. Lee and T. B. H. Stenhouse (12), on whom Taylor (strangely) relies for support of his thesis, that, in Lee's words, "much of the trouble that came upon the Church was brought on through the folly and fanaticism of the Saints" (334).

Typical of Taylor's in-your-face irreverence and penchant for selecting the sensational is his piecing together, from unfriendly and antagonistic contemporary accounts generally unknown in LDS histories, a description of the temple endowment, the sacred center of the Mormon religion. The awkward result only vaguely approximates and generally misrepresents the ceremony, as he well knew, while missing its spiritual and symbolic significance. Repeatedly, he attempts to balance and correct the traditional Mormon account by privileging the accounts of anti-Mormons and apostates. Thus he vaguely implicates Brigham Young, his perennial Mormon villain, in a little-known murder for which Mormons Stephen and William Hodge were hanged. Their brother Irvine had threatened, say Taylor's dubious sources, to reveal mysterious Church secrets unless Young sent Mormons to spring his brothers, but Irvine was "basely murdered in the streets of Nauvoo"—not far from Brigham's home (332-333). Such sensational anti-Mormon polemics, couched in conspiratorial tones, weaken Taylor's credibility.

Taylor's approach to the life of his grandfather in *The Kingdom of God or Nothing: The Life of John Taylor, Militant Mormon* (1976), the second in his Mormon history trilogy, is another attempt to "correct" Mormon history, which he asserts in his introduction, is "a mixture of doctrine and mythology, only incidentally historical" (ix). Taylor demythologizes the legendary Brigham Young, who was, he reiterates, John Taylor's life-long antagonist (5). He describes the relationship between Taylor and Brigham Young as "always prickly," and "worn paper thin" over several decades of disagreement, including Young's public rebuke of Taylor for mishandling the establishment of the sugar refinery industry in Utah Territory. In his opening chapter, "The Strange Death of Brigham Young," Taylor characteristically inserts one of his and Raymond's sensational conspiracy theories—that Brigham was a victim of arsenic poisoning (3 n. 2).

But if John Taylor's nemesis through the first part of the book is Brigham Young, the Goliath of Taylor's last two decades is the U.S. government. Taylor deftly narrates, among many events in Mormon history, the long war with the United States over polygamy. Indeed, Samuel W. Taylor's important contribution to Mormon historiography, here and in his later books, is his retelling of President John Taylor's spirited defense of "the Principle" in the face of overwhelming odds and certain defeat. Taylor is caught again in a most uncomfortable dilemma for a truth-teller—defending his grandfather's 1850 public denial of polygamy while secretly living as husband to ten wives (151-152). As Taylor demonstrates, Mormon leaders reverted to this policy of public denial and private practice after the Manifesto in order to carry out a divine fiat while outwardly conforming to profane human law.

Using his grandfather as focal point, Taylor presents the first cogent history of the Gentile attack on polygamy, 1860-90, which gradually eroded Mormon power, enabled confiscation of Mormon property, and resulted in the imprisonment of Mormon men and women for unlawful cohabitation. At the peak of "the Raid," John Taylor's eventful and dramatic life ended on "the Underground." He died a fugitive, determined that his church would not abandon the divine principle of celestial marriage.

Taylor retells, this time with footnotes, his grandfather's epic life as a partial correction of the story which B. H. Roberts, an LDS general authority, had related in *The Life of John Taylor* (1892). Although Taylor again privileges the startling and iconoclastic, *The Kingdom or Nothing* portrays, better than any other Mormon history of the period, the spiritual dynamics of a threatened but determined people. He recovers for his readers John Taylor's courage and faith, as exhibited, for example, on 1 February 1884, in his last official public appearance before going into hiding:

> "God has revealed to us . . . certain principles pertaining to the perpetuity of man and woman. . . . He has told us to obey those laws. The nation tells us, "If you do we will persecute and proscribe you." Which shall I obey?
>
> Surveying the sea of faces, he asked, "Shall I be recreant to all these noble principles that ought to guide and govern men?" He answered firmly, "No, never!" His deep voice rose, "NO, NEVER!" Then his roar filled the great hall, "NO, NEVER!" and he smacked the Bible on the rostrum. The audience responded with a fervent "Amen." (334)

In telling his grandfather's story, Taylor manages to be true both to his grandfather's spirit and his own predilection for the sensational by trumpeting what Roberts and other Church historians studiously omit—John Taylor's account that he was visited by Lord and the Prophet Joseph Smith, commanding him to keep "the Principle" alive by ordaining and commissioning others to continue the practice after the Church finally bowed to government pressures and stopped the practice (366-368).

Taylor makes public several such controversial revelations which he claims were suppressed after John Taylor's death. In an addendum, he accuses the First Presidency of duplicity about the "alleged revelation," which they announced did not exist (368), while in fact, he says, Raymond found eleven reproductions of the supposedly nonexistent revelation in the Church archives (368-370). After this startling disclosure, Taylor hastens to clarify, that, after all, "the vital issue of the controversy is not the existence of the alleged revelation, but whether or not it is accepted as church doctrine." He cites a First Presidency letter pointing out that the revelation, regardless of its origins or authenticity, is contrary to the Manifesto adopted by the Church and thus "could have no validity" (370).

Taylor begins the third volume of his trilogy, *Rocky Mountain Empire: The Latter-day Saints Today* (1978), with a fast-paced retelling of the battle over polygamy, focused this time on Charles Mostyn Owen, a professional anti-Mormon snoop and bounty hunter who observed, logged, and swore out complaints against post-Manifesto Mormons still practicing unlawful cohabitation (3-11). Although known among present-day Saints mainly by those who read Taylor, Owen was, he asserts, "the most despised villain of the entire history of the Saints" (3-11). So Sam Taylor takes pains to resurrect his memory. He also dusts off virtually forgotten Mormon dissidents, revisiting old controversies and oddities: Frank J. Cannon, disappointed politician and apostate son of George Q. Cannon; Moses Thatcher, LDS apostle excommunicated "for being out of [political] harmony"; corporate

Mormonism, which was forced during the Smoot hearings to reveal its widespread business dealings, about which popular Western writer Alfred Henry Lewis declared in *Collier's* that the Mormon Church is engaged in "a practical conspiracy against the United States Government" (77). Taylor returns to this theme in his chapter, "Latter-day Profits" (132-144). In other chapters he rehearses the slow death of polygamy and the concomitant rise of polygamous offshoots of Mormonism under such fundamentalists as Joseph W. Musser (100-107) (Bradley).

Taylor next attempts to bridge the large historical gap between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormonism by prose portraits of such anomalous twentieth-century Saints as BYU president Benjamin Cluff and his disastrous and embarrassing "South American Exploring Expedition of 1900"; Eugene L. Roberts and M. Wilford Poulsen, two controversial closet mavericks and BYU faculty members; Bishop John H. Koyle and his fabled Dream Mine; a reverential recapitulation of Bernard DeVoto's jaundiced article, "The Centennial of Mormonism: A Study in Utopia and Dictatorship," from *American Mercury;* and, finally, a quaint but curiously out-of-touch chapter on Mormon folkways in the world of the 1950s and '60s—obviously written from exile in Redwood City, well outside "the Zion Curtain."

Together, Samuel and Raymond Taylor compiled and edited the two-volume *The John Taylor Papers* (1984), the last and perhaps the most significant of their collaborations. This documentary history of the life of President John Taylor collects for the first time President Taylor's papers, correspondence, revelations, sermons, writings, and funeral services. Taylor's editorial interpolations are brief, pointed, and very useful in placing the documents in their historical contexts.

As one might expect, however, Sam Taylor could not resist inserting Addendum 2, "Never Friends: Brigham Young and John Taylor," which chronicles the longstanding feud between the two men. A typical item in this addendum to an otherwise objective book describes an interview with an unnamed old man who had been in Young's office one day when John Taylor, always immaculately and fashionably dressed, passed by the open door. Seeing the apostle go by, Young said, mockingly, "Little Beau Brummel." Overhearing the comment, Taylor stiffened, turned, came back in, and said, "President Young, I sustain you in your office as prophet, seer, and revelator. But I despise you as a human being.' Then with a curt, 'Good day, Sir' he turned on his heel and marched out" (521-522).

One looks in vain through other Mormon histories for this anecdote and for many of the other details and accounts—regardless of bias—which Taylor rescued from oblivion and recorded in his books of Mormon Americana. These nine books, variously dramatic, controversial, and sensational, but always rewarding, comprise a literary legacy which must be reckoned with, and, whatever its shortcomings, must be accounted for by twenty-first century Mormon historians.

VI

Samuel W. Taylor, Mormon maverick, tell-all-ironist, and incongruity hunter, spent his lifetime exposing perceived gaps between Latter-day Saint spiritual and social ideality and Mormon nitty-gritty reality. Even when his exposés wrenched history, he did so with such honesty, enthusiasm, and twinkle-in-his-eye zest that he charmed his readers while tweaking their noses.

He endured to the end in his maverick ways. Among Sam Taylor's last letters to me is a photocopy of the LDS Church's standard picture of a noble Adam and lovely Eve in the Garden of Eden. Typically not content to take the picture—or much else—at face value, Sam's comment is revelatory and instructive:

> [It] fascinated me. I hadn't realized that there must have been a beauty parlor in the Garden to do Eve's hair or that Adam had mastered the science of metallurgy, or was there also a barber shop? Equally amazing was evidence that in their brief period on earth Adam and Eve had mastered the textile-making skills; they had spun and woven cloth, and had sewed handsome robes. (Letter undated)

As the ultimate deconstructionist, Sam Taylor was never content with the status quo. In 1990 he sent me a photocopy of an article carried on the *Mercury News Wire Service,* which claimed, to coffee-drinking Sam's exaggerated relief, that "Drinking Coffee Doesn't Increase Heart Attack Risk." The article quotes a cardiologist as saying "I would not advise [patients] to stop drinking coffee," and points to studies claiming that decaffeinated coffee drinkers had a "slightly higher incidence of heart attacks." Sam chortles in the margin, "Coffee is okay, but Sanka is evil. Now, wait just one minute here!" He adds: "By golly, Satan never sleeps. How can scientists be so easily bought off by the forces of evil? I sure do hope that Salt Lake doesn't take this lying down. We've got scientists, also. I can't wait for the withering rebuttal." Never taking himself too seriously, Sam Taylor delighted, as one would expect, in the antics of those who did. He wrote me in 1980:

> As a funny man I sometimes am too funny. As for instance yesterday, when the local missionaries called around to collect a copy of "Heaven Knows Why" which I'd promised them. Then they wanted to see my office and library. Well, I have two identical Royal typewriters on adjoining desks, so I explained, "This one is for sacred writing, and that one for profane." They didn't crack a smile, and one said, "Well, that's an awfully nice arrangement." So I changed the subject. Then we talked about their work, and the fact that it takes 1,000 tracting calls to get a couple of people to listen to the message. "They think we're selling something," one said. "Why not give them the pitch right off," I suggested. "Tell them, 'All we want is 10% off the top.'" They also considered this seriously. Ah, me. But real nice kids. (Letter 1980)

If Samuel W. Taylor, incorrigible Mormon maverick, is presently employed, as I have it on good authority he is, as an investigative member of God's Last Judgment Inquiry Squad, it is likely that he has already earned his wings as an in-your-face cherub and that the Almighty is already looking nervously over his shoulder at the dogged probings of this obstreperous newcomer. "Not even I know," thinketh the Lord, "what in Hell or Heaven he is going to turn up." If Sam Taylor is given his way, *everyone* will know, and soon enough!

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NOTE

1. Some proponents of polygamy, basing their claims in John Taylor's suppressed revelation, soon began to establish outlaw polygamous sects, some of which have continued to the present. Fully opposed by the Mormon Church, with which they have no official connection, these sects have weathered social ostracism and such occasional legal challenges as the massive arrests made during the notorious 1954 raid of the polygamous group in Short Creek, Arizona, which journalist Sam Taylor chronicled in *I Have Six Wives: A True Story of Present-Day Plural Marriage* (1956).

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Those Who Hunger and Thirst After Writeousness

Harlow Söderborg Clark

This gathering always reminds me of Peter's words on the Mount of Transfiguration: "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4). We could hardly feel otherwise if we consider ourselves honorable people who act honorably, that is, people able to give and receive honor acting in a way that can both honor and be honored, but the goodness of art is not always obvious. Because art and criticism can be used for evil, it is tempting to call art neutral; but a tree which is neutral could not bring forth good fruit any more than a tree which is evil could bring forth good fruit. To say that art is neutral is to say it lacks moral overtones, a strange way to describe a discipline that so often deals with moral issues. So let me start with a premise and a prayer, "Lord, it is *good* for us to be here."

Now, having proposed that creating art is a good thing, let me propose a set of images consonant with goodness. I love to write. I love to sit or stand and make words rollick out of my fingers every day; but when writers talk about what they do, they often talk in unpleasant terms. "I like *having* written" is a common phrase, and Hemingway said, "Writing is easy. You just hold your arm over a piece of paper and open a vein." "Why do you choose to write about such gruesome stuff?" people ask Stephen King. His usual answer? *"Why do you assume that I have a choice?"* (xi). "[T]hose who practice these arts honestly would continue to practice them even if they were not paid for their efforts; even if their efforts were criticized or even reviled; even on pain of imprisonment or even death. To me that seems to be a pretty fair definition of obsessional behavior," King writes (xi-xii). And not to exclude poets, consider David Wagoner's, "If you *can* stop writing you should."

And I remember someone saying that Joyce Carol Oates, if she doesn't write every day, gets ill. I think the statement was half admiring, half disparaging. (Boy, is *she* weird!) All these reactions communicate a sense that literature is vaguely unhealthy. Indeed, in his satire *Why Literature Is Bad for You,* Peter Thorpe says we should study literature as we study any disease—to cure ourselves.

But why should it be strange that there are things we have to do every day or we get sick? There are many such things in our lives, and we do them without thought of obsession, so that only when we don't, or won't, do them regularly are people likely to think we are sick. These things involve the needs of our bodies, and our Savior—who gave up his ghost, then took up his body again that all might do the same—commended the needs of the body as a model of righteousness: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6); blessed are they for whom righteousness is sustenance. If he who gave his body to satisfy righteous hunger and thirst so honored words as to call himself the Word, perhaps we who honor words by creating worlds of words can honor the goodness of what we do with images that do not connote obsession and pain—not to puff ourselves up with pride, but not to denigrate what we do either.

Having suggested a way to think about writing, I would like to suggest some ways to think about reading what other people have written. But first a poem.

On the Road to Osoyoos

Bessie Söderborg Clark

Beethoven was easing us
Around the dusty mountain bend,
When our headlights caught her
Slender silhouette.
A car was pushing us from behind,
A truck crowding the opposite lane,
We couldn't stop,
We couldn't even hesitate.
Our hearts froze
As we hit her
Broadside.
Froze the screams
In our cab, where they
Lingered until we reached the town,
Where we picked doe hairs
Off our broken grille.

Let me ill use this poem for a moment as a metaphor for how some people read. By some aesthetic theories, readers are like people in the car enjoying the comforts of art, which suddenly takes them to a place where they can only watch, only ride out, not avoid. Later they will pick through the damage.[1]

Lionel Trilling, who pioneered modern lit as an academic subject, says he was reluctant to teach modern literature (roughly 1840-1940) because it contains immense destructive force, like a quinquereme (one of those great Roman galleys with five banks of oars that invades new worlds, bringing disease, pestilence, and slavery—in short, civilization) or a howitzer: a destructive force aimed at the society that had produced, and been produced by, centuries of European colonization and the industrial revolution. The essay is an accurate description of how literature was taught me from high school through graduate school. Thus, much of my literary training analyzed the tensions between art and society, art's devastating critique of society.

I'll leave it for another essay to explore the benefits and drawbacks of Trilling's sense that literature's power is mainly negative and simply note that the start of the modern period roughly coincides with the Pentecost at the Kirtland Temple dedication. It has often seemed to me that among the church (every -thing and -one "virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy") that Joseph Smith, in his dedicatory prayer, called "forth out of the wilderness of darkness [to] shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (D&C 109:73) were artists, thinkers, and storytellers creating art, thought, and story to break the hold of apostate philosophies on the world.[2]

And there was much that needed breaking. Our image of the gospel as a stone that the builders cut from Goliath's forehead, then rejected and tossed away to roll through the earth, growing in mass and energy as it smashes all kingdoms, finally glowing white-hot from the heat of its rolling, glowing white-hot and turning the earth to a sea of glass, naming it anew, is an image of destruction—and renewal.

I am suggesting that the destructive power of art inheres not in art but in the gospel, the Holy Spirit—the Pentecost. Which is also the source of the renewing and redemptive power of art. This latter power is worth focusing on, because one consequence of the idea that literature's power is negative and directed at society is the alienation of artists and society. This is such a common theme in art we may not think of its implications. Writers, musicians, and painters are humane beings who live with other humane beings, have families, spouses, children. To suggest that such people are outside the pale of society is to cut them off from the comforts of other people and to cut other people off from the comforts and beauty that an artist can give.

Another consequence is that we may interpret as attack art which causes us discomfort, which looks, perhaps, more at the tragedies of life than the joys. Or, we may think that only art which challenges or opposes society or its values is rightly called art. I am not denying the extravagant, destructive force Trilling ascribes to literature, but I want to suggest a different way of thinking about it.[3] The metaphor of art as a weapon gives art a power it simply doesn't have. Might I demonstrate with a short polemic.

I am right now reading Mikal Gilmore's *Shot in the Heart*, his family memoir, his attempt to make peace with his brother Gary, the first person executed in the United States after a ten-year hiatus—an event that happened not 30 miles away from me when I was recovering from brain surgery at age 18. A disquieting, tragic book, maybe a shattering book by the time I finish, but I cannot imagine it having the same effect as feeling trapped in a job I was coming to loathe, a job the company rescued me from by its bankruptcy. And I cannot imagine any work of art affecting the conditions of my life as much as that bankruptcy, which left us with $10,000 in unpaid medical bills, since the company had chosen to fund its own health insurance. I cannot imagine any work of art having the power to deprive me of a livelihood.

If you want a howitzer, a force no one can resist, imagine, in another company, two men laying off a quarter of their workforce to enhance the company's value so they can sell it and become billionaires. Imagine one of those men saying to the whole company, a company legendary for its bonuses, that there would be no bonuses in a year the company had earned $750 million, because, while that was the biggest earnings in the company's history, they had expected us to earn more.

I cannot imagine a work of art affecting my own artistic output like the clause in that company's employment contract that said all my creative efforts belonged to the company. I knew, of course, that it was aimed at programmers, not support people, but I couldn't help wondering—suppose I publish a novel—are they going to claim it? If I call that clause damned, know I am being descriptive, not profane. For about 19 months I wrote mostly criticism and theory, my creative work dammed up.

I cannot imagine any work of art having the power to cause as much stress and financial distress as Utah Valley State College's policy of never paying their adjunct faculty during the first month of a semester. I cannot imagine a work of art depriving me of a paycheck from December 15 to February 1.

Let me emphasize that everything I've mentioned here, every devastation of family values (for one of our culture's chief values is the ability to support one's family), is considered normal business practice. Despite the fact that normal business practice throws tens of thousands of people out of work every year, few would think to characterize business, a field of human endeavor, a discipline, as inherently dangerous to society.

Actually, I *can* imagine a work of art depriving me of a paycheck. Given how some publishers pay royalties, I can imagine going not six weeks but six months between checks. Of course, to an artist, "I can't imagine" is like a thrown gauntlet to a knight, a slap to a gentleman, a cape to a bull, a new rollercoaster to a thrillseeker, a bottle of Thunderbird or Maddog (spell it backwards) to a wino...—how many of these clichés can I come up with? I can well imagine a story about a person whose priorities are drastically rearranged by books, painting, music or art—who subsequently changes radically the way she or he lives. But of course that's a story—a work of art, not my life—*Don Quixote*, or is that "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote"? (Borges)

I don't trust polemics, so let me restate in nonpolemic terms what I have just said. But first another poem:

Smoldering Judas

Bessie Söderborg Clark

Smoldering in Hell, creosote-crusted Judas,
Giraffe-neck stretched in eternal pain,
Fused from searching upward
Through eons of sin,
Begging cleansing tears from Him.

With tear-flaked eyes
You professed to adore Christ,
You'd seen him raise the dead,
Knew he'd scourged the temple
And stilled the waves.

You wanted those soldiers,
Soldiers drunk on wine and cursed,
Muscle-bound to Rome,
To quake under that power
Your Kiss was meant to trigger.

Ah, but wither-brittled Judas
With burned-over eyes and tears of flame,
You didn't understand His choice of power:
The permeating warmth of the resurrection
Flowed through your searing-cold kiss.

Like other poems about Judas, notably Stephen Spender's "Judas Iscariot" and Reynolds Price's "Instruction," "Smoldering Judas" catches a deep irony—that Judas could not thwart or redirect Jesus' mission.[4] Let me use "Smoldering Judas" as a metaphor for my polemic. No matter how hard art tries to reject society, or to assail, it cannot: art is inherently communal. An author and readers, a performer and hearers, a painter and seers are all community, even if only two or three are gathered.

Let me restate in more personal terms what I just said. Indeed, let me use the terms Lionel Trilling set forth when he said:

> I do not know how other teachers deal with this extravagant personal force of modern literature, but for me it makes difficulty. Nowadays the teaching of literature inclines to a considerable technicality, but when the teacher has said all that can be said about formal matters, about verse-patterns, metrics, prose conventions, irony, tension, etc., he must confront the *necessity of bearing personal testimony*. He must use whatever authority he may possess to say whether or not a work is true, and if not, why not; and if so, why so. He can do this only at considerable cost to his privacy. (9; emphasis mine)

Let me risk my privacy and tell you a dream I had one night after I had stopped reading Peter Thorpe's caustic satire *Why Literature Is Bad for You*. I dreamed I was telling children a story, and they were laughing and giggling and climbing all over me. I took it as validation that I had chosen well in choosing to write, in choosing to tell stories. And in a way that dream came true. Not long after we were married, within a year or two, Donna and I were called to teach the Sunbeams, and they would crawl all over me, giving me love and laughter. Creating art, even art which causes discomfort, is a good thing, a blessed thing, an act of communion. That is my personal testimony—or that part of my testimony pertaining to my work with words.

Time for another poem. Since we've been talking about art not having the power to throw a family into turmoil, here is a poem that celebrates family. The author is my mother, Bessie Söderborg Clark. She came to me one day when *Sunstone* had made a call for folk poetry to be presented at one of its symposium sessions and asked, "What is folk poetry?" I said something like, "Have you ever seen Waddie Mitchell on TV?"—and she sat down and wrote this poem. "I don't know what folk poetry is," she wrote to *Sunstone*, "but these are my folk and this is a poem about them."

MIRRORED IMAGES

John Heber Lloyd (1857-1928)

I gaze into the gold-leafed oak-framed mirror
Hanging in my hall
I see not my reflection
But my Grandfather's stern face
Wondering why I bumped his portrait
From his ornate frame.

He was a stumpy little Welshman
Born in the Valley in 1857
Becoming one of the best craftsmen
In the territory
Carefully graining pine benches into oak
Stroking plastered walls into marble
Growing grapes and flowers from ceilings

His greatest challenge was goldleafing
Climbing the scaffolding on the temple spire
Giving Angel Moroni his first gold coat, 1894
Toiling high above the young city
Making ready Moroni's trumpet to proclaim
Completion of the temple
To proclaim glad tidings that all might see
And marvel

Sarah Jane Jones Lloyd (1860-1953)

My grandmother peeks
Timidly out at me
She, a child of eight, walking 500 miles
In the last handcart company
Just before the railroad was completed

Little Sarah Jane Jones
Who went running for the midwife
Late at night with only a sputtering candle
To guide her those four Paradise blocks
Imagining every post and tree an Indian

Who worked plain cloth into fine clothes
Crocheted dainty doilies
Bedspreads and table cloths
Who in her old age
Devoted her days to the temple

Who on my wedding day
Guided me through the veil
Into eternal endowment . . .
One of the last original Utah Pioneers
Dying in her 93rd year
Her time well spent

Bessie Lloyd Söderborg *Clark (1919-)*

I who as a young girl late at night
Curled up in her kitchen rocker
Anxiously waiting her return from the temple
Fearing the night noises
In the twelve-room house Grandpa built
Oh so empty since he died

Who dusted the red velvet love seat
With its intricate curlicues
Who stealthily crawled behind
The overstuffed couch and read *Little Women*
While pretending hard work
Or winding the big victrola and adding
My voice to its scratchy rendition
Of "Lazy Mary Will You Get Up"

Who inherited her love seat
With its hard straight back
And dust-collecting scrolls
Her little rocking chair

With its broken-cane seat
Her cut-glass crystal and hand-painted plates
Crocheted bedspread and dainty doilies

Who in my shrinking years
Shrink to think of 93
Lest mind and time
Spend not well

Bessie Lloyd Söderborg Clark is the mother of all writing in a rambunctious rollicking writing family. Her husband has gained some distinction as a writer—but he never set out to be a writer: that was indirectly Bessie's doing when she convinced him to return to school after the war.[5]

But Bessie always wanted to be a writer. She showed me once a rejection slip from the *Improvement Era* for some doggerel she had written—1940, or '39—before she met Marden. After the children were all in school, she returned to BYU to get her degree, but she didn't study writing. She told me once that faculty wives of her generation did not take classes in the disciplines their husbands taught. "We felt that if we did poorly it would reflect poorly on them; but if we did well, our teachers would say, 'Marden helped her.'" I tell this not because it is the most poignant story I know about literary silence but because the poems I have been reading illustrate wonderfully my sense that literature is not made to destroy, but to share—to share delight in words and sound and story.

Bessie Söderborg Clark is here today and has consented graciously to finish my presentation by reading a brief story called, "What's a Bastard?" One day after her youngest son asked her to mail a manuscript to *Sunstone's* fiction contest, she went home and wrote this story and got her husband to print out one of his. Neither of the stories won.

What's a Bastard?

Bessie Lloyd Söderborg Clark

I was scrunched behind the big overstuffed sofa, reading the forbidden works of Mark Twain. Oh horrors, I was reading the most forbidden book of all, *Roughing It.* I was tittering about what he said about the Mormon women. He said he had come to Salt Lake to set the Mormons straight about polygamy; but when he saw how homely the women were, his heart went out to any man who would marry even one of them, let alone several.

When I asked my mother why Grandpa wouldn't allow any of Twain's books in his house, she said because Twain told so many lies about the Mormons and it outraged my grandparents.

Well, I durst not let anyone catch me reading such lies; but while I couldn't keep from tittering, I did manage to keep from guffawing, and luckily too, because Mamma and Aunt Libby came and sat down on the sofa.

I was getting ready to make my presence known, when my mama's words stopped me. Lib, she said, why do you always lie about your age?

Oh, don't be silly, Matty, I never lie about such things.

Now, Mamma was only five feet tall, but she had been on the women's all-state basketball team and was a real scrapper, especially where Aunt Lib was concerned.

Oh, yes you do. Although I couldn't see their faces, I knew that Mamma was probably opening her eyes in mock surprise. Mamma's voice was stern. I happened to hear what you told Liz Smurtz about your age and it was a lie. I know exactly how old you are!

Aunt Lib sputtered for a few seconds and then said, I can't tell my true age because I'm a bastard.

What's a bastard? I puzzled. I could just barely contain myself from asking, What's a bastard?

Then Aunt Libby went on, I was born after the Manifesto, so that makes me a bastard.

Mama said, My father never indulged in such a vulgar practice; he believed in quality, not quantity.

Aunt Lib sounded very irritated. She got up and went to the door and I heard her say, My mother was only sixteen when . . . . Then I couldn't hear the rest as she went out the door.

I was twelve, then, and my fertile mind asked what horrible thing happened to Aunt Libby's mother at sixteen. Why I'll be sixteen in three and a half years and what happens to girls at that age?

The next day Grandma came on one of her frequent visits. I greeted her at the door, invited her to sit, and then innocently asked her, What's a bastard? She gave me a very odd look and said she didn't know. Grandma seemed to be dense about a lot of things because her answers about many things were I don't know.

Just about then my mother came in and told me I'd better go clean up the mess in my room. Well, I felt they wanted to talk about something that I shouldn't hear. I headed for my room then softly tiptoed back and leaned against the wall nearest to the overstuffed set. I heard them mention Mable, which kind of threw me because I didn't know anyone by that name, but then they mentioned Aunt Libby and from what they were saying I figured Mable was Libby's mother.

Well, I had met Mable a time or two then. She had about the most sour face I'd ever seen on an old woman, seemed almost as if she'd been suckled on lemon juice instead of milk. She was a short fat little woman. She wasn't jolly like fat people should be. In fact I don't ever remember seeing her smile. Then I remembered that something awful must have happened to her when she was sixteen. I figured it must have been bad enough to make her sorrow for nearly fifty years.

I pressed my ear close to the wall and I could hear my mother telling her mother that Libby confessed to being a bastard. Now I knew that Grandma didn't know what a bastard was and I waited anxiously to hear my mother tell her. Well, Grandma said, Considering what kind of life she's had, I guess you could say she is one.

If you looked close at Mable you could imagine that she had been a pretty girl at sixteen, with blonde hair and blue eyes like Aunt Libby, and Libby wasn't too bad looking for having such a sour-looking mother.

I heard Grandma telling Mama what Mable had told her. Mable had been in love with Willy and wanted to marry him when he returned from his mission. Now Willy came from a very humble home. His mother had been a widow for several years. With three children to provide for, she did washings and made clothes for more fortunate women. She had a few chickens. She called them missionary hens because the money she got for their eggs was put into a missionary fund for her sons.

Well, it seems that a suave, middle-aged stake president had taken a fancy to Mable. He called on her parents and asked if he could have her in marriage. Now, who could refuse a good-looking man like this? He seemed to have mountains of money and would be a swell catch for any eligible girl in the valley. He already had three wives, but I guess he could never get enough of a good thing.

Mable's parents felt honored that such a fine, good man wanted their daughter, even though they knew she loved Willy. They promised her that love would ripen for the stake president and insisted on a temple marriage. This marriage brought many children into the church, but Mable never seemed to get any joy from them.

Years later, I met Mable at a family gathering. She was a shriveled little prune by then and well into her nineties. It seemed she was loath to die. I said to her, Mable it seems you're going to live forever. She replied, in a little thin cracked voice, I hope so. I never want to die and meet that old bastard devil again that my parents married me to, after he already had three wives!

And I finally understood.

HARLOW SÖDERBORG CLARK is a freelance scholar and writer living in Pleasant Grove, Utah, with lovely views of Timpanogos and G Mountain if he turns from his computer and cranes his neck. This paper was presented at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, 20 February 1999, Westminster College, Salt Lake

NOTES

1. Nearly 23 years ago, I skipped some classes at Provo High and walked up the hill to BYU to hear Marden Clark give his talk in the College of Humanities Centennial lecture series, "Art, Science and Religion: The Profounder Challenge." He had, at other times, shared with me his sense that much modern and contemporary literature is a portrait of hell and therefore moral in its recognition that evil is indeed evil. He expanded on this concept by structuring the talk as a literary journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven, and sounded a theme he mentioned several times in classes I later took: It is easy to make hell dramatic—much harder, therefore a greater achievement—to make heaven dramatic. The paper also introduced me to Lionel Trilling's essay, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," which I discuss next.

2. Wilfried Decoo notes that socialism in Europe broke the hold of traditional religions and that, while American Latter-day Saints mistrust socialism, many European Saints owe their membership in the Church to socialism's freeing society from traditional sources of power. Reading Decoo's essay, I think back to our apartment in Finland when my father taught a year at the University of Oulu. The missionaries talked about how hard it was to teach their investigators tithing because, if they join the Church, they still have to pay taxes to support the state church.

3. It is worth noting that Trilling's metaphor is the metaphor of someone who has the power to require his students to read something he knows might devastate their sensibilities. You don't point a howitzer or launch a quinquereme without assessing how much damage you might do, Trilling says. A teacher who knows the power of art in his life and tries to predict the effect of that art on his students is acting responsibly, but his metaphors of attack suggest that literature's extravagant, destructive force comes up against us. We may resist as we resist any attack, but art comes upon us and overwhelms us. Let me make it clear that Trilling is devoted to literature and art, surely abhors censorship and other threats to art, but his metaphor is exactly the metaphor censors have always used—the metaphor of danger. Danger is always the justification given—I'm exaggerating only a bit—for censoring art. Trilling's metaphors ignore the fact that when I pick up a book and open the covers I am inviting the book. It is not ambushing me. If I don't like the book—if I find it discomfiting, disquieting, disappointing—I can set it aside.

4. These two poems, both speeches by Judas, offer very different views of Judas. Price's Judas begins, "I'm given the time it takes to tell you / Precisely this. Ask no questions. / There was one sighting which / Has not been reported by loyalists." The additional sighting of the resurrected Lord was to Judas, to return the kiss Judas gave him. The poem is part of a sequence, "Nine Mysteries," which explore stories in Jesus' life which are hinted at, but not told. In this case the implied story is why Judas hanged himself. Price's Judas does not suggest that Jesus forgave him knowing he couldn't bear the burden of forgiveness and would kill himself, but Spender's Judas does suggest a similar betrayal. In apostrophe he asks Christ who set up the world so that all things replay Eden, so that good must have evil to triumph over: "Who / Betrayed whom? Who had forseen / All, from the first." It has long intrigued me that Spender did not include "Judas Iscariot" in his *Collected Poems 1928-1985*, which, he says in the introduction, contains the work he wants to be judged by. Even more intriguing, that book is dedicated to Reynolds Price.

5. The story has come down this way. Marden didn't want to spend his life over a drafting board at Lockheed; so after he was drafted then rejected by a doctor on August 6, 1945 (Bessie's birthday), he took his wife and children back to his family's farm in Morgan. Bessie had other ideas, felt her husband had too good a mind to waste farming; and after one

legendary night's sleep in Clark Brothers's warehouse, he decided he would do what she wanted and return to school, for a year anyway. Several years later, while he was grading a stack of freshman papers, the phone rang: "Marden, I don't want you to worry," his father said, "but Mother may be dying." Unable to continue grading, he started playing with words, images of her arthritic fingers "clutch[ing] like talons at [his] sympathy" (Clark 1980, 3). When he started writing poetry, he felt guilty at taking time from his paper grading to write; when he retired a quarter century or so later, he felt guilty at taking time from his poetry to grade papers.

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A Gathering of Mormon Poets

Readings

Robert A. Christmas

My poems are statements in words about human experience (mine—real and/or imagined). I aim to express subjects—stories and ideas—and to evoke feelings in my readers that match the feelings I have for my subject matters. My feelings per se aren't important. What's important is that the emotion is appropriate to and enhances the reader's comprehension of my poetic subjects.

I aim for clarity, on the surface. I want my reader to "get" something out of that first reading. Then I want to poem to resonate in the reader's mind and feelings, so that subsequent readings are deeper, richer—and of course I take pains to hide little treasures for the "experts." I hate "pretty" words and phrases, but I love diction and syntax in illuminating juxtaposition.

I often write about Utah and Mormonism—unique subjects. These poems are derived from the joys and sorrows that I and others have experienced as members of the LDS Church. I don't see my poems as "representing" the Church—but they are, for better or worse, representative of the experiences of some members. I mean the Church no harm by these poems. As an artist, I simply believe that the confession of a sinner is as valid as the profession of a saint.

Driving on the Lake Bed

On the freeway in Utah,
you can look up and see
a line against the mountains.

It marks the shore of an ancient
lake so vast that most of the history
of the state lies under water.

Perhaps this is what accounts
for our feeling a bit in lieu of, a bit
drowned—in traffic on I-15

(say munching a large order
of fries and sucking a surreptitious
coke—well past

middle-age but still marrying
and unmarrying)—in view of this,
perhaps we should expect to be

caught glancing from time to time
at the shoreline, reminded that maybe
things were like this before the flood too.

Cold Shoulder

Just south of Logan, Utah,
he pulled off a wintry road
and cried as if his heart would break.

It was over a young boy,
and a little girl

(you can imagine the story).

Now, more than twenty years later,
he's listening to the voice
of a young lady

passing through, passing by—
on her way
from one country to another.

It's one of those just-saying-hello
voices, so brief, so unexpected
he forgets to ask about her brother.

But he remembers that cold shoulder
in Utah. He remembers his tears.
And he remembers he was leaving.

Vegas

He wouldn't make love
on their wedding night.
She was disappointed, but
wasn't it redundant?
Besides, he was tired.
He was very tired.

The next day, strolling
the Strip after breakfast,
he felt weak and woozy
under the lights, thinking
What have I done?
What have I done?

On the drive down, watching
sunlight halo her hair
while she dozed against the glass
in her frilly dress, he'd figured
this might be enough—
it just might be.

But now, slinking back
into Utah, up the Virgin
River Gorge while she sat
smoking his Marlboros
and looking triumphant,
he doubted it would be.

Self-Portrait as Brigham Young

He pioneered his name into the Church.
Friends, family said, "You're nuts!"—
so he set off alone. He was eighteen.

On the first day out, he got lost;
and for the next twenty-seven years
he wandered the wicked West, left

two wives and two children on the trail,
and almost forgot his calling—
till he stumbled, at last, on the Valley.

Ill and exhausted, in a station-wagon
with five kids who wouldn't settle,
he gazed at the Great City.

The temple had been finished long ago,
and most of the old streets
looked as strung-out as he felt

after sixteen hours on the Interstate
without a cigarette—
but he could live with that.

"This is still the right place,"
he announced to his squirming children.
"Drive on. Drive on."

Stake Mission

Their place was a junkyard with Joshuas,
and they'd play Mom and Pop

to any delinquent on the desert.
We'd be forever having

the first discussion in the front room
while skinheads rifled the fridge.

Their daughter had boobs
that defied gravity—like Brother Bill said,

it strengthened your testimony to be there;
and we had hopes for them, until the night

their rowdy son beat his sister's boozer
boyfriend past waking up,

and they all panicked and piled
in the truck and drove fifty miles out

for a hasty memorial on the hardpan.
Miraculously, rockhounds found him.

Then the cops came, with iron questions,
and we were released.

Directions

Why he stopped in Delta
on his way north and bought a shirt—
he couldn't remember.

Was there a button
missing? Or maybe an ash feel off
his cigarette—or maybe not.

What he remembered was
there was a woman in Provo more
interesting than the woman

he was living with (and
a woman more interesting than
that woman after that).

800 North 780 East (of what?)—
Utah addresses were confusing, so
he stopped at a station
by BYU and asked
directions—and got lost
most of the time since.

Fightin' Words for the Utah Pioneer Sesquicentennial,
1847-1977

Crossin' the plains was cake—
and walkin' the whole way barefoot's nothin'
if you've never had shoes.

Some 70,000 made it. (Two to four housand
died.) Most of the handcarts
left early and beat the snows.

Read the *Emigrants' Guide*; they took it
a mile at a time—the trail well-marked
and safe as your average freeway.

Rough is relative, pardners. Try truckin'
coast to coast, or fight cancer;
get divorced without dyin'; raise

a rowdy kid. And think about this:
danged near the hardest part of the journey
was just seventeen miles from Salt Lake,

where from Big Mountain Summit they could see
the south end of the Valley, before they
dropped 2,000 feet down back up and

down a steep and narrow tedious stump-
clogged crooked excuse for a road
that crossed Last Creek nineteen times.

Think about it, and maybe you can figure
why the going seems to get toughest
when you're almost (or already) there.

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Deseret, and Southern Utah State College, where he served as department chair. His poetry, fiction, and criticism have appeared in several journals and have been anthologized in *Greening Wheat, Harvest,* and *Tending the Garden.* His work has been honored by the Ina Coolbrith Society, the Association for Mormon Letters, and the American Song Festival.

Prevented by a sudden illness from attending the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, 20 February 1999, Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Christmas authorized Dennis Clark to read representative poems on his behalf. The poems reproduced here—several of them the same—are drawn from his personal selection.

My Quest for the Poetic: A Reading and Commentary

Robert M. Hogge

I admire poets, those who are able to arrange the right words in the right order on the page. For me, writing poetry is difficult. Though I love to toy with words, this wordplay often results in verse, not poetry. But verse has its uses as in this limerick:

That Rogue Hogge

There once was a rhymster named Hogge
Who thought McKuen and Guest were in
vogue.
The verse he declaimed;
Young minds he estranged.
What a shyster, a scoundrel, this rogue!

I like to write parodies of poets I admire, such as Emily Dickinson, the creator of small poems, but ones that encompass large ideas. In this parody, I use the computer to have fun with what many of us feel is her unconventional punctuation:

<Poem #4D>

PUNCTUATIONS * My *forte*"-
Its ^importunate To be;
Tha't>weve been taut t:articulate\
Our 'comma_s for a fee@

I–Dash–Around–Tween–Capitals–
–More–Trippingly–Than–Thee===
But [it's} is Belladonna
To all the World–but Me $

Sometimes various images of death swirl in my head, ideas drawn from Donne's "Death, Be Not Proud," "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," Dickinson's ["Because I could not stop for Death"], and Blake's "The Tiger." When that happened to me once in a weak moment, I reflected, not on death, but on today's medical advances that might extend natural life unreasonably.

The Coachman

Death, you're a chatter of crows
with a velvet cowl that shrouds a simpering skull.
A dime-store demon! Your bony hand grasps a
scythe, its edge
like the down of a dove.

You I do not fear.

It is your coachman, the sinister one
who takes me to you,–that chills me.
I cringe as distant hooves crescendo
on cobblestones. The crewel-curtained carriage
careens in a fiery crescent

behind a team of stallions–a white Arabian, a
crimson courser, an ebony hunter,
a pale palomino. He reins
the restless steeds in front of my porch
and steps down to open the door for me.
What dark thing crouches behind black
curtains waiting to spring?

Compelling imagery fascinates me, like the swirling rocks and trees in Hilda Dolittle's "Oread." In a similar way I revel in the minimalist style of prose fiction writers: Ernest Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" and Djuna Barnes's "Smoke," for example. Conciseness. Less certainly can be more. Here is my salute to these three writers:

Upon the Golden Days

The earth swells at my caress.
I kneel in the grass just beyond
the scimitar of smell,
lilacs languishing in late light.

The shimmer of amethyst.

I touch rows of wooden chairs
and white, bare boards.

A bud nipped from a waxlike leaf.

I impress her with minted memories.

Attar, a pearl.

Visual poetry, in the style of William Carlos Williams and e. e. cummings, appeals to me. After reading Langston Hughes's poem "Genealogy," I sat in the lunch room at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City one day, my eyes tired, surrounded by pages of newspapers pinned to the walls, the headlines shouting the President's latest scandal, my mind wandering to Heisenberg and Darwin. And I scribbled on a pad:

Genealogy

Each day
I visit him
in his white
house, his eyes
flickering like
microfilm,
spittle
h
a
n
g
i
n
g
between
particle
and path,
my father,
the missing link
between me
and them.

But, more than anything else, it's a religious poem I hope someday to write, poetry that crackles, as many of Gerard Manley Hopkins's do for me. Yet I begin tentatively with verse.

The Holy Family

I look up from shavings
to see him watching me–
his eyes on the cup
I'm carving, the knife curling
the core out of the block.

He begins, imitating me,
his small hands shaping

the air in front of him
into a chalice.

* * * * * * * * * *

Sitting on heavy mats,
my legs folded under me,
I watch her walk into the room–
her hair long and black,
her eyes dark. She leans
over my shoulder, her warmth
lightly brushing my arm.

She fills our bowls with lamb
simmered in blood-red wine.

He sits across from us,
head bowed, his eyes
on the tiny piece
he has gently torn
from the still-warm loaf.

And then I think of the young Jesus in Jerusalem:

Early Light

An only child alone
at first light.

Mary's son watches
the wings
of a large black bird
as it passes over
Jerusalem.

Under dark clouds,
men on soiled temple steps
tinkle coins
into outstretched palms.
Can this be
my father's work?
the boy wonders.

More than twenty years pass, and cousins meet at the Jordan:

Sunburst

Over a small flame on a bank
above the Jordan, I roast
locusts, dipping them
in honeycomb.

He comes, his eyes beckoning.

I walk with him down into the river,
the water hip high. Insects chirr
under broken branches. Caves dot
distant cliffs.

Sand and pebbles swirl
around my toes as I dip him
deep–his eyes closed, his hair
like the feathers of a dove,
curling above his face.

I raise him–
water beading on his beard–
his red robe dripping–
his eyes finding the face beyond mine.

His father's voice uncovers him.

Light caresses us in a sunburst
of love.

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Selected Poems

Scott Samuelson

By My Son: The Ishtar Gate

My son borrows my black pen
and scratches beards and spectacles
on Peter, James, and John:
It's Restoration Sunday.
Suffering from acne and little guilt,
he has staked his place against the wall.
He takes the book but does not sing.
I offer the trays. He blinks, gives
his head an insignificant shake.
His dyed hair flicks his divine
mouth—a gesture of resignation,
a cat twitching to get set.

On his arms, thin kitten scratches.
All his years he has never passed
an animal and not touched it.
The deeper scratches are, I believe,
self-inflicted.
A deacon stumbles
through duty, a priest sees a vision
of his mission.
All priesthood holders
file to fill the choir seats: *Oh Babylon!*
Oh Babylon! We bid thee farewell.
On the back row with other elders of Israel
I stand by my son.
I belt my good-byes to the gated city.
Nose to book, Stephen too mutters.

At home the mother cat has caught a bird.
I gather it, ruffled and warm,
drop it into the near-empty garbage can.
It scurries (alive after all that!) under paper.
I should kill it kindly, but it is beyond my reach.

Long ago Jewish slaves, paraded to the blue
Ishtar gate, saw, if they raised their eyes,
the Lion Frieze along the Processional Way
to Imgur-Ellil, where rows of bas relief lions,
regal and glazed, bare their teeth from Babylon,
and look not a thing like the cubs they once were.

The Snow Fell

at our house last night—
most in the yard, some
inside the front door.

At six the customary bells
bade me rise and rid
my world of white.

With me at this hour merely
the minor vehicles my sons'
friends have ridden

to our place and not had
the strength—or will—
to ride back:

Michael's orange bike leans
into the wind, Kennedy's
lies almost storm-buried,

and Nathan's moped parked
forever in neutral—all
companionable like silent pets

requiring nothing but space,
space that in their absence
would be taken up by nothing—

but space. When my friends saw
my storm, some were sorry: "Heard
about your snow. Too bad."

Some offered help: "Hey, if
there's anything I can do. . ."
The accusatory—"What're you

doing about that big precipitation
problem at your place?"—are kind

enough to keep silent.

Most, knowing the air above
is ready to turn, hurry home
and wait for their sky to break.

Through the Tight Window

When they locked up my son
I thought: now he's their problem.
And again I was filled with guilt,

but I can cover pain now and then
as fathers do who've loved
their random, wandering boys.

They take him through the drug door
and I am left to sharp memory,
the lies and mights of recollection.

At the brink he does not falter—
the way Amelia Earhart ever took off
toward the receding, distant curve.

It seems no time since I threw him
high above my head. The earth
always brought him back giddy.

I cannot imagine him no longer riding
on my shoulders or strapped in his car
seat behind, left to navigate.

Then he set off as some tired
explorer, a seeker of records in
another kind of flight. I lost him

to new highs and lows—trips
he alone could know. Today
he looks down at depressed tile

that rises to swallow him like
the flat, black Pacific.
We're forever seeking the lost.

My son, look up through the tight window
of your new space, and eye to the west
the open sky and resilient worlds beyond.

III. Ad Libitum

You've quit piano.
Everyone does. Even the great
Rubinstein at 90 left it.
His late ivory hands,
newly graved, curled just so
in his ebony coffin
training themselves
for their new diminuendo,
their reluctant rallentando.

You quit your mother womb
and that's working out—
at the quick uterine downbeat
you left, a tempo, the whoosh
and swirl of the duet
for the terrifying,
the lively solo stage.

You have read your passages
faithfully, invoking scale
and key to school your fingers.
I have heard you start
at the lowest white A, dark
as the birth canal,
and with sure stroke
command time's elliptical felt
hammers through their eighty-
eight tones, through the high
bright C of heaven.

Debussy tried you:
his two's against three's
taught you to twine
fantasy and discipline,
until, in that strange mix,
that arabesque that is a father's
love for his perfect daughter,
you soared again and again
into that intricate, fragile
lattice work, my heart.

Soon you will leave again,
and I will be forced to stuff wax
into these ears, bind this
chest to the mast, to protect
myself from your silence.

Boomerang

I am my father. Gray hair, weak
heart. He died at 49. At 45
I've had one infarction already.

TV mail order offers a $19.95
video history of strange
aircraft: flying wings—

giant V's you'd think couldn't fly,
vertical take offs. My father,
deprived of flying status,

drove our '61 Opel station wagon
as if it were his B-26 Marauder
and a family outing were a war.

Tucked in the spare tire well—
a flask. He didn't like to fight
but was always good for hostility.

Becoming like him—my worst fear.
but I summon him from death,
spend Saturday with my boys.

We laminate oak strips into V's
to make boomerangs for their
school projects. February thaws,

and we venture to throw them,
following directions, then instinct—
we've never done this before.

The spinning hatchet of flight
shoots low and out, then, as if
drawn by memory, arcs up and back,

draws momentum from high above
and drives down toward me. I turn
my back and cover my head. It hits,

scatters slush five feet from me.
Before I caught the knack of it,
there was no fear. Now, my sons

run from me. I wind up to throw
again—the sport, the risk,
the passion of the violent return.

Milestone

for Elaine Nielsen

I did not mind until today
that the cycle has run its course:
my mother wets her bed, cries
at night for her lost way.

You can see through her skin.
Her thickest bone, pencil thin.

Today my mother did not know who I was.

A hip fall ago she shuffled
to the organ to sound memories
for a friend who'd passed beyond.
No sheet music, a 3 x 5 card
with titles alone and fingers
that remembered, knew the way
in and out of old tunes.
Thick glasses, glowing hair,
quavering smile—none of these
mattered. Music coursed from
a pool that no hard arteries could dam.

At four I sat on my mother's piano lap
and the pulsing keys echoed
the blood of our womb. Later
she'd quiz me: "Listen. Who wrote this?"
And play
Twinkle, twinkle little star,
How I wonder where you are.

I change your sheets.
I comb your fragile hair,
your rhythms all your own.

I saw your eyes today,
saw that you did not see.
Who is this?
Mom, it's only me.

SCOTT SAMUELSON teaches English at Ricks College, Rexburg, Idaho. Lance Larson also read poetry in this session.

Desert Phoenix

Janet Garrard Willis

Dear Tami:

It's raining outside. Sheets of water wash the summer dust into the gutter and sweep the first autumn leaves underneath my car in a good, Northwestern-style downpour. I imagine you have a similar view from your dorm window, although I never made it as far as that northern town, all farmers' markets and evergreens, that you opted for over the button-down Mormonism of BYU.

Utah may not have the ocean and rainforests of western Washington, but at the moment it certainly has the rain. Rain! Thunder and lightning! All of God's fury thrown into fireballs and flooding street corners! Do you remember how I used to tell you that thunder was the Second Coming, and you'd go screaming toward the fence, flailing your four-year-old arms to fend off the earthquakes?

Not that the Second Coming ever comes with such dramatic warning, and not that it comes only once. Christ appeared to me today in the form of a needle plunged unceremoniously into my wrist; I am at-one-ment with an I.V. drip.

I've put off writing you since I was in the Missionary Training Center, since my hair started falling out in strands and draping the shower drains like wet orange lace. When the 737 flew me back over the plains, back to the mountains I was supposed to leave, you were the only one I didn't want to see, the only one whose worry worried me. The ward and the rest of our family had their laying on of hands and their prayer rolls, lifelines of faith reeling me back from heaven on a tether.

Even I considered it romantic at first, sliding quietly into the MRI, pretentiously waiting to touch the hem of some doctor's white garment. The elders gave me stilted blessings from the white bible of mission conduct; I loved their cracking voices, the crisp pleats in their blue suits. But as the mission president shuffled me back onto the plane I raged past romance into bitterness: Dammit—I was supposed to finish teaching Marcia Rodriquez how to read, see the DeLeon twins soaked and beaming in new white dresses. My bitterness and my romance both embarrass me now, since both make assumptions of drama in a circumstance that lacks the unnatural.

In our family, the natural was supposed to be held paramount, a lesson learned trudging up alpine ridges and diving into glacier-fed water at Seven Lakes Basin. But for me, nature was vacation and escape. Thick forests and Washington drizzle, cool shade, a brook lullaby, illusion of some prelapsarian Eden. You probably don't remember this, but when I was twelve and you were eight, our family drove across northern Montana on the way to Gram's ranch. We stopped one night at an obscure campground and set up the yellow Jan-Sport dome in the dark. I unzipped the tent flap the next morning, stood up, rubbed the dirt off my face, and reeled. I think that was the first time we ever saw a desert. Ascetic. Hot. Nothing hidden. The ground cut into my feet, and the dust left an orange stain on everything it touched. I gashed my toe on a rock and hobbled around the sagebrush, leaving a bloody path of curiosity.

The campground had a shack for an outhouse, a tall skinny space like a coffin turned vertical. The boards were bleached and cracked from exposure; brown-haired spiders crawled through the walls above the toilet and the sand blew in. The tin roof buckled at the edges, leaving irregular spaces between walls and ceiling. Each space bulged with brush and dirt from the desert floor; each bulge made a terrible noise—raspy, uncivilized, pathetic. The baby birds inside the nests didn't know song yet, but they knew hunger and announced it to the desert without hesitation.

I could see a few beaks sticking into the air, a few yellow points of denial. Where were the mother birds? Why were all the nests there, so I had to step in guano and smell the warm stink of feathers just to use the john? I stepped on something cold and looked down at the crumpled body of a baby bird at my feet. And then another, and another—a graveyard of winged infants, topsoil up. I guess they had tried to fly, tried to leap from underneath the bent tin that clamped over them like a fist, tried to stretch inside the red horizon and follow their mothers into sky. Besides, the sun on that tin roof must have converted the nests into ovens; maybe they just flung themselves over the edge in an attempt to escape the hellish heat. For whatever reason, dozens of birds lay rotting around the baseboards of a forest-service outhouse. Their siblings screeched above them; I saw one fall and made no attempt to replace it. I was no savior, no bird. Just a dirty kid with a full bladder and blood on my feet.

We drove away, before the sun could climb high enough to scorch the sand. I've thought about that day a few times since, but never with disgust, or distaste, or anything less than a sort of baffled wonder. I'd never seen nests like that. In all the time you and I have logged in the back country, I'd never seen death lying at my feet without apology. I missed that part of the lesson: The natural world is neither merciful nor cute. It is not a pristine Eden. The natural world—even in human absence—is filled with the bloody carcasses of the arbitrary.

Oh, the processes themselves aren't arbitrary. The Creator and evolution—not dumb luck—ensure the endurance of a wolf with sharp teeth, the rabbit with speed and camouflage. As *Genus/species,* they have the order of natural selection, of a God who keeps his pieces in easily explicable rows. But as individual members of a species, no matter how guided by God or science, the wolves and rabbits are on their own.

Annie Dillard wrote that a tenth of the world's organisms are parasitic; I wonder what tithe I pay. *Lupus Erythematosus/n/: a systemic disease of unknown cause and unpredictable course* . . . "Your body turns against itself, systems feeding on other systems," says the kind doctor, her table holding both aspirin and a scalpel. A disease that makes the body its own parasite. Someone named it "Lupus" because the scarlet flush on patients' faces resembles the marking of *Canis lupus,* the wolf, animal symbolic of both ferocity and grace.

The illness is as elusive as its namesake. My fingers have grown cold, the ends of my toes a dull grayish blue. Aching joints and exhaustion pinpoint an animal the doctors cannot find in my blood but warn me about anyhow. Two tests read negative, one at the MTC and one performed by a well-meaning Spanish doctor who read "sister" on my nametag and announced how good it was to see a young woman ready to become a bride of Christ. So I flew back to where I started, back to the needles and the MRIs and the mountains outside the window and out of my bed-ridden reach.

You were away when I came home; you didn't come with the rest of the family to meet me at the airport. The conservative Sunday dresses remain in your abandoned closet, the picture of Jesus feeding the birds hangs alone on the bare wall of your old room. You snipped your own tether long ago, left bitter about the stories that mislead you in Sunday School: Miraculous healings. Simplicity. The good people always receiving the good reward, God a vending machine for the righteous. Perhaps on the surface of language, that 's what we learned, just like our trips to the forest where, on the surface, escape and nights by the campfire. We remembered resurrection morning often enough but forgot the suffocating dark at the cross. But that doesn't mean our Heavenly Father intended the easy answers, any more than Oliver, our father here, meant for us to see Disney in the wilderness.

I believe Christ *is* the benevolent figure feeding the birds, washing His apostles feet, blessing the children. I see God's tears in the streaking fire of August perseids, God's face revealed in the quiet, moss-draped chapel of the Olympic rainforest. But if the scriptures—with all their human filters—tell truth despite, in, or partially through text, then God is as much flash flood as Jordan. More paradox than easy answer. He is the waves of returning water at the Red Sea, the gaping chasms of earth that devoured whole cities, the blood on Elijah's altar, the flames that licked sacrificial bullocks. He blew life into hyena and dove, equally sacred.

At church we talk about Christ's return, about the glory of our inheritance. But change surrounds us, and every death is Armageddon. For those who see the natural world as God's book, there is no uneventful interim between the present and the Judgement. But the Gospels tell us that God sees the fall of every sparrow—every one, individual, each death as relevant to a parent as destruction and salvation en masse. The Garden of Eden necessitated the Garden of Gethsemane. The Garden of Gethsemane brings us, through pain, the Gardens of Zion. Fall to be redeemed. Die to live. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Pass through sorrow, and you might know joy.

I find my peace in these juxtapositions, in the wilderness. In wolves mating for life, a pack frolicking in a meadow, the loner tearing flesh from bone. I find my peace in a forest where loam and life come from the rot of a dead tree, nurturing all that is green. In a God who gives his children guidance but allows individual struggle, who weeps but allows them to continue peace and cruelty that makes this world, Tami. Like the angel that guards Eden and the Tree of Life; he wields a sword. Don't settle for one of them—don't take pacification *or* rage as adequate weapon for redemption. God is good, and the good encompasses both sides of the fruit—one half concupiscent fall, one half eternal life. Spin it in your palm; you have to eat it entirely. Whole.

So I may become one of the birds that fell. You remain one of the birds left in the nest, screaming from hunger, missing the parent you think has disappeared. You will go on screaming, after I fall, after I cease from screaming. And although I value our individuality, I have to say that we are alike, we are *Genus species*—just like the birds.

You are my sister. You write poetry. You listen to Joan Baez. You kick at men who try to hurt you and at men who try to love you. You don't eat meat. You like sad movies and hot food. You laugh deep, from the gut. You argue with closed fists, and you dance with palms held open. You are my sister, and you will keep on screaming. If you didn't, if the birds in the nest stopped expecting their parents to feed them, stopped trying to reach heaven because they'd seen so many siblings fall, the wilderness would fail.

I can feel pain in my wrist from the needle, pain in my head. I can also feel the sweet pain in my heart, the pain that yearns for earth, for flight. The rain outside washes the leaves from underneath my tires, washes the dust into the gutters, washes the gullies of the desert, washes the doubt from my soul. God sends the storm; God sees each bird drop, then fly. Love the nurturing rain, and the fiery lightning.

It's the Second Coming.

Love, Janet Lynn

JANET GARRARD WILLIS was, when she wrote this paper, a graduate student in Renaissance literary studies at St. Louis University. "When not laboring over school-related tasks," she writes, "I dabble in my husband, David, in search of a really decent Korean barbecue. Eventually, we think living in Nepal would be rather nifty." This paper was read for her at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting, 20 February 1999, Westminster College, Salt Lake City.